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THE THREAT OF SITTING BULL

A Story of the Time of Custer

"INDIAN" STORIES
WITH HISTORICAL BASES

By D. LANGE

12mo Cloth Illustrated

ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX

THE SILVER ISLAND OF THE CHIPPEWA

LOST IN THE FUR COUNTRY

IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

THE LURE OF THE BLACK HILLS

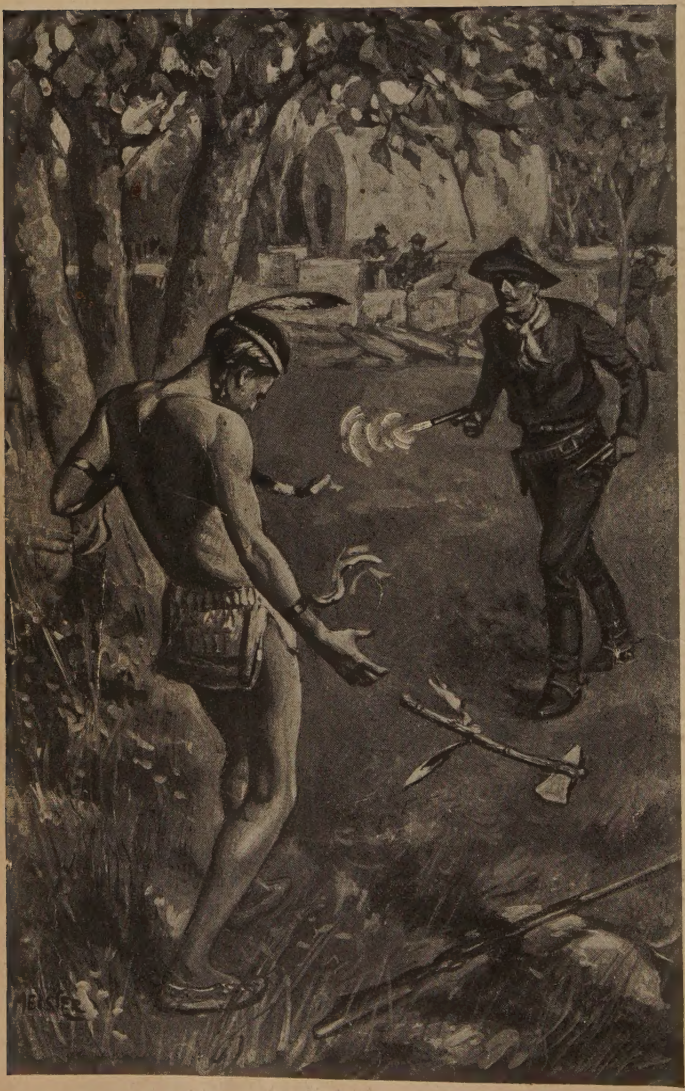
THE LURE OF THE MISSISSIPPI

THE SILVER CACHE OF THE PAWNEE

THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

THE THREAT OF SITTING BULL

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., BOSTON



JOE RUSHED AT THE SIOUX.—*Page 80.*

THE THREAT OF SITTING BULL

A STORY OF THE TIME OF CUSTER

2915 / 300

BY

D. LANGE

AUTHOR OF "ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX," "THE SILVER ISLAND OF THE CHIPPEWA," "THE SILVER CACHE OF THE PAWNEE," "THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES E. MEISTER

BOSTON

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The Threat of Sitting Bull

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FOREWORD

THE Sioux, or Dakotas, were the largest and most warlike nation of the northern Plains Indians.

Originally friendly to the whites, they became restless and even hostile before the beginning of the Civil War, when white settlers began to encroach upon their fertile lands in Iowa and Minnesota.

When in 1862 only a few regulars were left at the frontier posts, and when thousands of young farmers and men in the towns had been called east, the Sioux, under Little Crow, attempted to regain all their lands west of the Mississippi. About 800 white people were killed in this outbreak.

This was the first of a series of wars with the Sioux, which culminated in the campaigns against the Western Sioux in 1876.

The most famous battle in all our Indian wars was fought between United States soldiers, under General Custer, and the brave

Sioux warriors on the Little Big Horn in Montana on June 25th, 1876.

The different tribes of Sioux are now living peaceably on reservations in the two Dakotas and Montana, with some as farmers in Minnesota. The total number at present is about 28,000.

The extermination of the buffaloes compelled all the Plains Indians to travel the "white man's road."

Our present story plays in the stirring years of 1875 and 1876. There were still many buffaloes, elk, bighorn, and antelopes west of the Missouri, but the Northern Pacific Railroad had already reached the Missouri, while steamboats ran up this river as far as Fort Benton in the present State of Montana.

In the battles fought against Generals Crook, Custer, and Miles, the Sioux made a last desperate attempt to stem the invading tide of the white race.

D. LANGE.

St. Paul, Minnesota,
June, 1920.

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The Threat of Sitting Bull

CHAPTER I

SIOUX SCOUTS

WASHITA JOE and his two boy companions had at last reached the border of the Sioux country.

The first Northern Pacific train of the spring of 1875 had just arrived at Bismarck on the Missouri, and Washita Joe, with Hank Stamford and his younger brother Don, had at once hurried to the bank of the great river.

"Look, Joe, look!" exclaimed Don, "there are two Indians on horseback on the prairie beyond the river! Who are they? What are they looking for?"

"Sioux scouts. Scouts of Sitting Bull," replied Joe without hesitation. "They have come to see if the train brought any more

'long knives' and surveyors to push the railroad into their country across the Missouri.

"A few years ago the Union Pacific was built across the buffalo plains of the western Indians, and now the Northern Pacific is projected across the buffalo range of the Sioux nation in direct violation of the treaty of 1868; and the Sioux object.

"You remember what the officer on the train told of Sitting Bull's threat: 'If the railroad is built, my people will fight.' He has boldly told the soldiers and the representatives of the government, and I think Sitting Bull and the other Sioux chiefs, Crazy Horse, Gall, and others, meant what they said.

"Within a few days all the Sioux and Cheyennes between the Missouri and Rocky Mountains will know that the 'fire wagons' are running again to the Missouri River, and their scouts will watch every move of the surveyors west of the Missouri. And they will report the doings of the soldiers at Fort Lincoln on this river near Bismarck, of General Crook at Fort Fetterman on the Platte,

and of Colonel Gibbon at Fort Ellis out west on the Yellowstone.

"Well, boys, let us go back to town. I suppose your appetite is ready for a good supper. To-night we'll have a long sleep in a bed that is not shaken by a rumbling train. To-morrow we must buy horses for our long trip to Bozeman, Montana. It will be a great trip of a thousand miles across these northern plains. Boys, I am happy to see the plains once more. Right glad I am that I did not buy that little store in Boston."

"Will the Indians let us get through?" asked Hank with some misgivings. "The three of us couldn't fight very many Sioux."

The two scouts had by this time increased to five, and like threatening outposts, they stood silhouetted against the western sky.

"No, we cannot play the game the way we did with Custer on the Washita. They would get our hair in no time. We shall have to play the game Indian fashion.

"But come along, boys. Let us find a hotel, and after supper I shall do a little scouting in town. Maybe the Sioux are not

so warlike as the officers on the train told us. Perhaps they will not trouble us, when they see we are not soldiers or surveyors."

"Don't you think there may be a thousand Indians just behind the hills?" asked Don. "These five alone would not ride out where the soldiers might catch them."

"No, Don," Joe replied with a smile, "these scouts are not afraid of the soldiers, who might as well try to catch so many antelopes. The Indians would scatter and disappear into the broken country and wooded ravines, where the soldiers would not dare to follow."

"But, you caught the Cheyennes on the Washita," objected Hank.

"That was different," explained Joe; "Custer did something that had never been done before. He made a rapid march against their camp in midwinter, and took them completely by surprise; but in spite of that, they fought bravely.

"Some of us were pretty well scared, when we discovered that there were several other large camps on the Washita River be-

low the camp of the Cheyennes. Almost any other man would have lost his head, but Custer didn't. He is a great Indian fighter. When he saw the danger, he ordered the band to strike up our favorite tune of 'Garry Owen,' and we all fell in and rode boldly forward toward the next camp. That bold move unnerved the Comanche, Kiowa, and Arapaho warriors, and you should have seen them run! They thought we were only the advance guard of a big army. Had they known that we were only a few hundred all told, they could have wiped us out.

"But I fear Custer will never catch the Sioux in that manner. They are too wary. They are also well armed and are the most numerous and the bravest of all American Indians.

"If all their warriors joined the hostiles, then Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Gall might have an army of five thousand fighting men."

The three walked along in silence, and Hank wondered if Uncle Reuben in Boston

would have let them go, if Joe had told him about the formidable strength of the Sioux. But Joe had not deceived Uncle Reuben, for much of this information about the hostile attitude of the Sioux he had gathered from civilians and officers on the train between St. Paul and Bismarck.

Suddenly a thundering boom rolled up the river from Fort Lincoln, three miles below.

"Listen," exclaimed Don with a startled face. "Listen! The Indians and the soldiers are fighting now! The soldiers are shooting at them with a cannon."

"No, no, Don!" Joe quieted the excitable boy. "I should not have told you all this about the Sioux. That is no battle gun we heard just now. It is only the peaceful sunset gun of Fort Lincoln. It means that the soldiers are through with their day's work.

"Let us go in here for supper. It looks like a good place. You don't need to worry about fighting Indians just yet."

Boiled buffalo tongue and a roast of fat buffalo tenderloin with browned potatoes

made Joe and his boys feel drowsy, and all three of them went to bed early, Joe saying that he would find out the next day what had happened around Fort Lincoln and in the Sioux country during the winter.

CHAPTER II

HORSES AND INDIANS

WASHITA JOE was not a novice on the plains and in the Indian country. He had served some time with the garrison at Fort Totten on Devil's Lake in the present State of North Dakota. He had then been transferred to the famous Seventh United States Cavalry and had been with Custer in the great battle on the Washita River in the present State of Oklahoma.

In this fight Custer surprised and defeated Chief Black Kettle's band of the southern Cheyennes so severely that all the tribes in that region learned to respect the United States Government and to fear Chief Long-Yellow-Hair and his cavalry. The great fight took place late in November of 1868. When, some years later, Joe's term of enlistment expired, he returned to

his home town of Boston. He had told the men of the regiment that he had seen enough of Indians and adventure and intended to settle down.

At the end of two years he was convinced that he could never be happy again in the East, and was glad to escort the two Stamford lads to their father, who had established himself in business at Bozeman in the present State of Montana.

The Stamford boys had grown up in the family of an uncle, their mother having died when the boys were very young.

The lads carried with them some important papers and $10,000 in greenbacks, which Stamford's Boston partners wished to send to Bozeman. The papers and the greenbacks were soldered up in a tin box, which Hank generally carried on his person.

When Washita Joe was stationed at Fort Totten, he heard much of Henry Plummer and his gang of white robbers and cutthroats who murdered the lone miners for their gold dust, and committed hold-ups and murders on the stage-coach routes between

Western Montana and the Union Pacific Railway, Denver, and Salt Lake City to the south.

Later, while with Custer in the Seventh Cavalry, he, like all the soldiers on the plains, heard and read many tales of the incessant fighting along the old Bozeman Trail between Fort Laramie and Bozeman. At Fort Phil Kearney, on this road, there was constant fighting, and every soldier on the plains in those days knew the story of the terrible fight in the Wagon-Box Corral near Fort Phil Kearney. This fort and others along the trail had now been abandoned, and the Bozeman Trail was closed by the hostile Sioux, who threatened to kill every white man that dared to enter their country.

It was for these reasons that Joe had chosen a northern route to reach Bozeman.

"I know Indians and know the northern plains," he had told Uncle Reuben, when he and that gentleman were discussing routes, "but I don't like the idea of being held up and murdered by white cutthroats and road-agents; though I guess the Vigilantes have

caught and hanged most of them by this time."

And now Joe and his two wards had reached Bismarck, which was at that time the western terminal of the Northern Pacific Railway.

"If I live," Joe had told Uncle Reuben, "I will take the boys through and deliver them and their tin box safely to their father at Bozeman."

The boys would not listen at all to going into Montana by railway and stage routes, after Joe had told them that they might go on horseback, by way of the northern plains, and that on this route they would surely see real living wild buffaloes, antelope, mountain sheep, deer and elk, and wild Indians; not the kind of which there were a few stragglers still in New England, or the kind that Cooper tells about, but the real wild kind, which Joe had fought on the Washita.

Under promise of strict secrecy, Joe had shown the boys a scalp, a real Indian scalp, which he had brought as a trophy from the campaign. How he had come by it he would

not tell, but Don was sure that it was the scalp of Chief Black Kettle, whom Joe had killed in a hand-to-hand fight.

There was no holding the boys after this. They induced Uncle Reuben to let them take riding lessons and to let them go to the rooms of a gun club for rifle and revolver practice. So eagerly did they enter into this line of schooling that even Joe was surprised to see how quickly they learned to handle both horses and guns.

The masters in the old Roxbury Latin School, which the lads attended, could at first not understand why the bright Stamford lads had suddenly become so dull in Greek and Latin.

"That stuff won't do us any good on the plains," Don protested, when the more conscientious Hank urged him to study. "I want to learn Sioux; that may save our lives."

The boys had already learned the few Sioux words and phrases which Joe remembered, and now they had borrowed at the Public Library a Sioux dictionary, which the

Rev. Stephen R. Riggs, missionary among the Sioux in Minnesota, had published some twenty years before in one of those formidable-looking Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge.

"Hank, we can learn a lot of that by heart," urged Don. "Joe can pick out the words we need to know. Sioux words are not half so hard as the beastly Greek verbs."

"Are you going to be a missionary, little boy?" a mild-looking lady had asked Don, when he called for the big book at the Boston Public Library.

"No, ma'am," Don had answered proudly, "I'm going to enlist in the United States Cavalry of Chief Long-Yellow-Hair, as soon as I'm old enough."

Before Joe and his wards left Boston, Don had promised to send a real Indian scalp to seven of his boy friends, and Hank had vowed to write to Rachel Burnham and send her a pair of beaded moccasins.

It was broad daylight when Don awoke in the hotel at Bismarck.

"Hank, get up!" he called. "We have to help Joe buy horses and pack our stuff."

By the time the lads had eaten their breakfast, Joe had already made the rounds of all the livery barns and sales stables in town, and had taken a look at a hundred horses.

"There is a fine white mare," Don pointed out as they looked at a herd of ponies and ranch horses in an open corral. "Buy that mare for me, Joe," he whispered, "if she is not over a hundred dollars!"

"That mare?" Joe asked with a friendly laugh. "Don, I wouldn't take her as a gift!"

"Why wouldn't you? I feel sure that she is a fine saddle-horse. She is built just like the finest horses in the riding-school."

"Yes, she is built all right," Joe admitted. "But she is white, and she is a grain horse. We take nothing but bays, and blacks or very dark grays. No whites or calicoes; and they must all be grass horses.

"An Indian would see a white or calico horse ten miles off," Joe explained. "And we can use nothing but grass horses, animals

that are used to pick their feed at night, because we cannot carry oats or corn."

It took Joe the better part of the day to select six horses, three for saddle-horses, and three for packers and extras.

"They are sure a scrawny-looking bunch," remarked Don, as they took the troop out on the road to try them out. "Our riding-master would call them ghosts. Believe me, Hank, they will play out before we get five miles out of town."

But Don soon changed his mind. They were all good travellers, they were not afraid of water, none of them was gun-shy, and Joe said they were all trained buffalo-hunters. Although the men rode them hard for about twelve miles, not one of them showed a wet hair on his body.

"Don't we want a good hunting dog?" suggested Hank.

"I don't know, boys," Joe answered. "He is likely to make us more trouble than he is worth. He is pretty sure to get his feet full of cactus spines, and we shall not need a dog to find game. On the other

hand, if he barks or starts to run game, he will betray us to any roving war party of Indians; so I think we had better do without him."

"But Long-Yellow-Hair always takes hunting dogs with him," argued Don. "You told us yourself."

"I know he does," Joe admitted. "But you must remember that Custer has a regiment of cavalry with him. He does not have to be afraid of small Indian war parties, but we are likely to have trouble enough with the rascals as it is.

"I hear that the whole tribe is in a very ugly mood, and most of the young warriors are openly hostile. Two of their big war chiefs, Crazy Horse and Gall, would not even sign the treaty of 1868."

"Crazy Horse!" remarked Hank. "What queer names the Indians have."

"They do sound strange," replied Joe, "but they always have a meaning. The whites often mistranslate the names. Crazy Horse should really be Wild Horse.

"I have no doubt that Sitting Bull, Rain-

in-the-Face, Black Moon, and Two Strikes all refer to some incident, which the Indians remember and understand."

"Did the Indians give you a name?" asked Don.

"Yes, they did," Joe told laughing. "You have noticed the scar on my forehead. The incident that gave me the scar also earned me a new name. One of the boys in my company had gotten the best of me in a horse deal by trading a wild, hard-mouthed animal off on me. One day in the presence of our Indian scouts and some Kiowa prisoners, the beast suddenly shied at something, and threw me, and I landed with my head on a rock. When I scrambled to my feet, half dazed and with the blood running over my face, the rascals all roared. If one is not killed or badly hurt, Indians as well as soldiers show no mercy to a man, who has met a mishap.

"'He-Knocks-His-Head!' one of them called out, and after that they never called me by any other name."

CHAPTER III

UNGUARDED MULES

THE boys were impatient to start, but Joe was in no hurry to get away. He said he thought he wanted to get a little more information about his Sioux friends. The boys might get on their horses, and put in the day visiting Fort Lincoln. But he advised them to look sharp about, and they must get back in daylight.

What Joe learned that day did not add to his peace of mind.

He talked very little while he had supper with his boys, and seemed but little interested in the many strange things which the boys had seen at Fort Lincoln.

It was not till all three had gone to their rooms and Joe had lit his pipe that he began to talk freely.

"I am afraid, boys," he started, "we are in for a hot trip. In fact, I don't know if

we ought to go on. It kind of looks to me as if we had better go back to St. Paul and then try that stage route from the Union Pacific after all."

"Have the Sioux gone to war? Won't they let us get through?" the boys asked.

"No, they have not exactly gone to war," Joe explained after a brief silence, "because no troops or surveyors have yet entered their country this spring; but they have been fighting the soldiers and all white men during the last two years.

"And the worst of it is that the Indians are within their rights, and they know it. Soldiers and railroad surveyors and prospectors have no right to be in the Sioux country under the treaty of 1868. I do not understand why President Grant does not see that. I think the country is in for the worst Indian war in our history." And Joe smoked for a while in glum silence.

"Where will the war be?" Hank asked, trying to understand just what Joe had in mind.

"It makes me mad," Joe resumed his

story, " the way the Indian Department and the whole government is muddling things. It is a plain rotten outrage. Treaties are not kept, the soldiers are sent here and there, and the Indian agents sell to the angry Indians all the guns and ammunition they want. When the crash comes, those Indians will be better armed than the soldiers. Grant was a good soldier, but a lot of greedy politicians are too much for him. Well, it's no use. The more I think and talk about it, the madder I get."

"I don't understand just what you mean," Hank remarked.

" I'll try, boys, to make it clear to you," Joe continued, almost breaking his pipe as he knocked out the ashes. " It's a —— Well, it's a rotten shame! But I will make the story short.

" General Stanley and Custer were sent in here—I mean into the Sioux country in '73, that is, two years ago. They marched after the Indians up the Yellowstone River as far as the mouth of the Big Horn. They had some skirmishes with the Indians. A

few soldiers were killed and wounded, and, no doubt, a few Indians were killed. Then the Indians withdrew into the wild country south of the Yellowstone, and the soldiers marched back east to Stanley's Stockade and to Fort Lincoln.

"Then, last summer, that is, in '74, General Sheridan orders Custer to explore the Black Hills with his cavalry. Custer, of course, had to go. He did the job well and reported to the Secretary of War. The result is that thousands of gold-seekers have rushed into the Black Hills.

"But the bad mess of it all is that neither the soldiers nor the prospectors had any right to enter the Black Hills. It is Sioux country, reserved to them by a solemn treaty!

"Now the government is trying to keep the gold-hunters out, but they can't do it. It would take the whole United States army to keep them out.

"The Indians, of course, believe that the white people do not intend to keep that treaty.

"And what has the army accomplished by marching troops here and there, and back and forth in the Indian country? They have angered the Indians and have made them think that they themselves are better fighters than the soldiers and that the soldiers can't catch them. Stanley's campaign up the Yellowstone reminds me of the old saw: 'The king of France marched up the hill, and then marched down again.'"

Hank and Don thought they understood now what had happened in the two years just passed.

"And what is going to happen this summer?" they asked after Joe had refilled his pipe.

"This summer?" Joe snorted with disgust. "Hang it, boys! This summer it will be some more of the same haphazard campaigning. Things will grow worse. The editor of the Bismarck *Tribune* told me that for two years it has not been safe for a man at Fort Lincoln to go a mile outside of the stockade. The garrison has practically been besieged, and horses

and mules have to be brought in every night."

Only one cheerful story he had heard all day, Joe continued, puffing hard at his old campaign pipe, and that wasn't very cheerful to the white men concerned in it.

"Yes, I will tell it to you, boys," he consented, when the lads asked to hear the story. "Maybe it will help me to get over the blues.

"Of course, you know that the army does not use grass horses, though I have often thought every fort ought to keep a bunch of them or a bunch of real Indian ponies.

"Well, some young chap from Iowa secured a government contract two years ago to furnish the hay for the cavalry horses and the government mules at Fort Lincoln. He bought a lot of mules and horses, and wagons and mowers to cut the hay on the wild prairie, in the river bottom.

"He was a real tenderfoot, who had never been away from his little Iowa town; but one of those wise young fellows who know it all and do not take any advice and do not

listen to any warning. He started cutting hay, and at night he let his mules and horses run loose on the prairie without any guards. He hadn't seen any Indians. They wouldn't dare to touch the property of a United States citizen. He and his men would show them, if they got fresh around his camp.

"Well, one fine morning the mules and horses were gone, every last one of them.

"The young fellow was mad and wanted the soldiers to go after the Indians and get his mules back. The commandant laughed at him, and told him to go himself and chase his mules, or go to any other place if he preferred.

"He and his men borrowed some cavalry horses and followed the trail for a day. Next day they came back, all badly scared, with a bunch of Sioux hot on their trail, and the young fellow had an arrow sticking in his back, so the doctor had to cut it out for him; but they had not seen a tail of the mules. The young fellow and his men went back to Iowa on the next boat, leaving their wagons and mowers on the prairie.

"Next summer, a stranger came up on the first boat. One day he told the captain that he was a banker, and that he had a chattel mortgage on those mules of the hay-makers. He told the captain that he had written to General Custer about his lost mules, but Custer had not even answered his letter. He thought if it was explained to the Indians that he had a chattel mortgage on the mules, the Indians would be quite willing to give them up.

"Captain Marsh let the fellow off at Fort Lincoln, but he did not find anybody who was willing to go and explain to Sitting Bull, and Rain-in-the-Face and Gall what a sacred instrument a chattel mortgage is.

"The fellow returned to Iowa in an ugly mood and said he was going to report the case to President Grant and demand that General Stanley and Custer be court-martialed.

"It is the best story I have heard for a long time," Joe concluded, "but I can tell you another one that made me laugh.

"One of the steamboats unloaded a lot of oats on the bank of the Yellowstone for the

cavalry horses, but the Indians found the oats, before the soldiers could get it. Now, what do you suppose they did with them?"

"Stole them for their ponies," the boys answered.

"No, they didn't. They stole the sacks, but left the oats."

"What funny things Indians do!" cried Don. "Why didn't they take the oats for their ponies?"

"Boys," the old soldier chuckled, "an Indian pony would no more eat oats than a dog would eat hay."

"What does he eat?"

"Grass, of course. Nothing but grass."

"But what do they feed him in winter?"

"Feed him? Indians never feed their horses, and make no hay for them."

"But what can they eat in winter?"

"This western grass is good feed all winter, no matter how dead and dry it may look. But if they cannot find grass, they eat cottonwood bark. The Indians do cut down some trees for them, and that is as near as an Indian ever comes to feeding his horses.

"Let us go to bed, boys. This western air has made me sleepy. Maybe we had better take the next train back to St. Paul. I sure don't like the looks of things around here. I am not much afraid of losing my own hair, but I feel that I ought to see you boys safe through to Bozeman or take you back to Boston.

"By next summer, maybe, the trouble will be fixed up or Custer will have taught the Sioux the same kind of lesson that he taught the Cheyennes and Kiowas and Comanches.

"Good-night, boys! I roll in for the spirit land."

CHAPTER IV

ARE YOU GAME?

NEXT morning Joe declared he had slept well, but that the prospect for a safe trip across the plain did not look any brighter to him.

He always slept well on the plains, he told the boys. He would sleep well, if he knew he would go into a pitched battle with the Sioux next morning.

"There is one big thing," he asserted, "a man learns in the army. To go ahead, do his duty, and not worry about himself. I think all of us who rode with Custer to the Washita were stoics."

"Stoics," asked Don. "What is a stoic?"

"I don't know what the dictionary says it means, but I always thought it meant a man who goes ahead and does his duty, no matter what becomes of him.

"Most of us came back from the Washita, except Major Elliot and fourteen men who followed the fleeing Indians too recklessly."

Joe stopped as if lost in thought.

"What became of them?" Hank asked with bated breath.

"They were surrounded and died fighting. We found their bodies and buried them on our second trip to the Washita."

"Why didn't the Indians take them prisoners?"

"Indians don't make prisoners of soldiers and fighting men."

Later in the day Joe and the boys rode on horseback down the east side of the river to a trading post opposite Fort Lincoln. Old Fort Lincoln was located on the west side of the Missouri, three miles below Bismarck.

The boys had suggested that they cross on the ferry at Bismarck and see what the country west of the river looked like, but their leader did not fall in with this plan.

"The country," he told the boys, "would be interesting to scout around in a bit, but I fear we might stir up some Indians, who

think they have a chattel mortgage on our horses.

"I am not in a hurry to meet my Sioux friends again. My feeling is that they will show up soon enough, if we go ahead with that northern trip."

At Fort Lincoln, Joe had all his bad news confirmed, and heard more of the same kind, some of which he did not tell the boys.

He also learned that about twelve hundred men were expected to arrive soon at Fort Lincoln, including Custer's Seventh Cavalry; and a steamboat was also expected to ascend the Yellowstone. Joe was convinced that these plans would only serve to make the Sioux more hostile.

When evening came, he was more in doubt than ever.

The boys suggested that they might go up the Yellowstone with the soldiers or take passage on the steamer.

Joe had thought of both plans, but the soldiers as well as the steamer were likely to turn him and his boys loose in the most dangerous part of the country. And if the

steamer was under government charter, the captain might refuse to take them.

Altogether, Washita Joe had never been so much perplexed. It seemed to him that compared with his present difficulties and doubts, the hard winter campaign against the Cheyennes and Kiowas and Comanches had been nothing but boys' play. He did not have to bother about this route or that; he did not have to worry about anybody's safety, not even his own. In marching, camping, scouting, or fighting, he just obeyed orders and that was all there was to it.

"What would you do," asked Hank, "if you did not have us to look after?"

"By the great horn spoon," vowed Joe, "if I was alone, I would say, 'To thunder with all the Sioux. I'll strike out for the plains, and take my chances on getting through.' I never realized how a man may be unnerved, if he is the one responsible for everything that goes wrong. If Custer had ordered me to ride to China, I should have started out at once, Indians or no Indians!"

"All right, Joe," replied Hank, "if you

feel that way about it, you just be Custer. Don and I will be your men, and when you say 'March!' we march. We came out with you to see the plains; we are not looking for any tea-parties."

"You bet! That's right," Don chimed in. "We didn't come out for any tea-parties. We want some adventure. I say, 'Let's go.' The Sioux can't hit us any easier than they can hit you."

"All right, boys!" exclaimed Joe, thrusting out his arms. "If you are game, I'll be scalped if we don't go!"

CHAPTER V

THE DISPUTE

While Joe and the boys were preparing for their journey, a company of six traders came in on the train, and after talking over their plans with Joe, it was decided that he and the boys would go in the company of the traders.

The six traders were men with but little experience on the plains, but they seemed to be hardy, and brave fellows of good character. They realized that their venture at this time would expose them to some dangers and risks, but they expected to follow a route far north of the main camps of the Sioux. If they did not fall in with small camps of friendly Sioux, they expected by a détour to the north to make their way to the Crow country in southwestern Montana, and ultimately they hoped to reach Bozeman and Virginia City.

They had a valuable assortment of goods

which they intended to carry on two four-mule wagons. Each man was also provided with a saddle-horse, and if on any part of the route wagons became impracticable, they would be ready to abandon the wagons, pack the most valuable goods on their mules, and cache the rest.

Washita Joe did not feel so sure as Walsh Rankin, the leader of the traders, that the Indians would not molest friendly traders, but he felt that nine men, well armed and with plenty of ammunition would be able to compel good behavior on the part of such camps or small roving war parties as they might meet.

It took about a week for the traders to complete all their arrangements, but there was no hurry because the party did not intend to leave Bismarck until the new grass had started on the prairie, so that their horses and mules could find plenty to eat. The men reasoned that they could take no chances on having their animals become poor, for they realized that they might have to do some long and fast riding.

At last, about the middle of May, the grass showed pale green on the prairie slopes, and the expedition was ready to start, very much to the delight of the boys, whose patience had been severely taxed, although with riding their horses and shooting at an improvised target range every day, their time had been well used. Without the boys knowing it, old Joe had put them through a kind of training camp, which, he hoped, would enable them to endure the hard travel before them without soreness and too much fatigue.

Joe tried to persuade the traders to start after dark, but the traders ridiculed this idea.

"What?" exclaimed Walsh Rankin. "Sneak out of town like a bunch of road-agents? No, old fellow, we'll start in daylight. And if our friends want to give us a send-off with a brass band, I am agreeable. I reckon we shall hear little else but tom-tom music for the rest of the summer."

"You jump in the Missouri with your brass band," Joe retorted angrily. "You

fellows think because you once sold some calico to the squaws and treated the bucks to some of your rotten whiskey, no Indian is going to hurt you. Don't you know that the whole plains country is dotted with the bones of fellows who did not use common-sense care, when they travelled through dangerous country?

"I know, and you ought to know it by this time, that travelling in the Indian country is going to be dangerous this summer. Now, if the boys and I are going to travel with you, you fellows are going to use ordinary precaution. If you are not willing to do that, we strike out on our own trail. I am not going to take a fool's chances with the lives of my boys."

"Don't get mad, Joe!" argued Rankin. "We are willing to be careful. But what is the need of sneaking out of a white man's town after dark?"

"I will get mad, and I will leave you, if you are not going to listen to reason," the old soldier came back.

"Can't you see, Walsh Rankin, that being

careful doesn't do any good after your horses are stolen or your scalp is off? I don't want those Sioux scouts that hang around on the bluffs to report to a lot of wild young bucks that a bunch of fool white men has started north with wagons and horses.

"Can't you see what a fine chance we would offer them to ambush us, while we are travelling north toward the big bend of the Souris? Some of their young men who have not yet counted any war coups, could not wish for a better chance to secure some fine horses, a lot of plunder; and, maybe, a few scalps."

"I have not seen a Sioux scout for a week," Rankin argued.

"Neither have I," admitted Joe, "but I am quite sure that they have seen us.

"For God's sake, Walsh, get it out of your head that there are no Indians where you don't see any! If that is the principle you are going to follow, you and your men will lose your scalps and the boys and I will not travel with you."

Rankin had still other objections to start-

ing after dark. The men in town would think he and the other traders were afraid of the Indians, moreover, some of the boys,—he meant his young men friends,—had planned to go with them a day's journey and try their greyhounds on some antelopes.

"Well, all I have to say, Walsh, is that you must have been half over when you made that kind of a tomfool plan. You fellows all have plenty of courage; but for Indian traders, somebody short-changed you on good sense. If you respected the Indians a little more, you would keep your hair on longer.

"The boys and I will be ready to-morrow night; but no brass bands, and no greyhounds, or we don't travel with you."

When the old soldier met his boys at supper after this discussion, he was not in a very happy frame of mind.

"Common sense," he concluded after telling the boys all about his arguments with Rankin. "Common sense seems to be about as uncommon at Bismarck as it is at Boston.

"I fear we shall have trouble with these

fellows on the trail. They are a bunch of young fellows with more than their share of brag and bravery, but they are short on good sense.

" Some of them will never get back to tell the girls about their wonderful adventures in the Indian country."

Joe felt that perhaps the young traders would take him at his word, and let him and the boys start by themselves; however, early next morning, Rankin came and told him that the boys all agreed it would be best to make the start as Joe had planned it; because he had had so much more experience with Indians than any of them.

Thus it came about that on a warm May evening in the spring of 1875, the little caravan of two wagons, seven mounted men and five extra horses, quietly slipped out of Bismarck on the eastward trail along the Northern Pacific Railroad.

A few miles east of town they struck out northward for the great bend of the Souris or Mouse River, about one hundred miles north of Bismarck.

On this river they thought they might find small camps of friendly Sioux, or possibly Assiniboins from Canada, with whom they might trade for valuable northern furs, such as marten, otter, and silver fox.

None of them had ever been over this particular route, but with compass, sun, and stars to guide them, they had no fear of missing their destination. Their plan was to travel straight north as far as the character of the country allowed it, and to keep from ten to fifteen miles east of the Missouri, so as to avoid crossing the deep valleys of the creeks and small streams that enter the Missouri from the prairie.

CHAPTER VI

THE WILD PLAINS

It was the first time in their lives that Hank and Don had ever travelled at night, and a most uncanny way it seemed to them.

For an hour they could see the dim lights of Bismarck and those of a few squatters in the neighborhood. A train whistled and the glaring headlight of a long freight or construction train flashed through the darkness. A strange rumbling noise came through the night, there was another long whistle, and then the night of the endless wilderness settled over the travellers. The white man's land lay behind them, and the dark land of the Sioux and of wild bird and beast swallowed them up.

It seemed to the lads as if their own small cavalcade made enough noise to be heard for

miles. How those wagons rattled! And how loudly the saddles creaked!

"Indians can surely hear us a mile off," asserted Hank.

"So they could," Joe admitted, "if there were any of them near. But I do not think that there are any large camps of hostile Sioux east of the Missouri. Most big camps are farther south, between the Yellowstone and the Platte. The country around here gets pretty cold in winter. But I did not want to give the rascals an invitation to follow us. Nobody knows who all those reds are that come into Bismarck almost daily. They are supposed to be friendly, but nobody really knows. I have asked the traders not to tell anybody in what direction we have gone, and I hope they have kept mum."

Don was much more excited than the older boy. He kept close to the side of Joe, who rode ahead a little way to pick the trail. Whenever a dark rock or a pile of dirt, excavated by badgers or coyotes, became dimly visible, Don's heart began to beat fast, and his hair seemed trying to rise under his hat.

It had been agreed that there was to be no loud talking and calling, but when a frightened buck snorted at the travellers from the head of a wooded coulée, and then broke noisily for the brush below, Don's nerves gave way.

"There's the Indians coming!" he called under his breath, and he seized his rifle ready to defend his life, while he felt the gooseflesh creeping all over his back.

"Don, don't be silly," the older brother admonished the excited boy; "that's a scared deer."

"How,—h-how do you know—it—it's a deer?" the shivering lad defended himself. "He—he wh-whistles like a mad Indian!"

Hank started to laugh, but Joe stopped him, saying kindly, "You need not be afraid of Indians now. They hardly ever attack at night. If there is an Indian within twenty miles of us, he is curled up in his blanket in his tepee or in the shelter of a wickiup, where the wind does not strike him."

When Joe further assured the excited lad

that he was not at all on the lookout for Indians now, but was just riding ahead to pick the best trail for the wagons, Don became quiet and began to laugh at his own fright.

The world of night seemed to be entirely different from the world in daytime. Never had the boys imagined that there could be such a medley of voices of the night. The coyotes' weird howl and yap seemed to be all around them, and a few times the call of gray wolves came from the distance. The sloughs were alive with quacking ducks, screaming rails, and many other strange notes. Even the air overhead was not silent. The lads recognized the familiar cries of the killdeer, but there were many faint lisping notes in the air, as of small birds; for the spring migration of birds was at its height. Now and then an owl circled overhead of the travellers; and several times, frightened sage-hens and prairie-chickens rose up almost under the horses' feet.

When at last the stars had faded, and one could see some distance ahead in the soft

gray dawn, the meadow-larks began to whistle their cheerful song; and on the bushes of the coulées the ubiquitous song-sparrows began to trill their morning ditty; and all sense of war and danger seemed to have disappeared.

Joe stopped on the bluff of a wooded ravine. "I think we may as well camp here for breakfast," he said. He took the saddle off his horse and picketed the animal, and the boys did the same with their horses. The traders, however, just turned their animals loose, although Joe warned them of the danger of doing so.

"If a band of Sioux should come shouting and yelling out of that ravine," he cautioned them, "your mules and horses would stampede before you could catch a single one of them."

But the traders laughed at him, saying they were not afraid of Indians.

"Yes, that is the trouble with you fellows," Joe remonstrated. "Some day you will get scared just a minute too late."

In about two hours the mules were again

hitched to the wagons while Joe and his boys were again acting as advance guard.

Whenever they came to a rise of the endless brown plain, Joe dismounted and carefully examined the country in all directions through his glass, without exposing himself against the sky.

"How could you see an Indian miles away?" the boys wanted to know.

Joe explained to them that he might not see the Indians themselves, unless they were travelling in the open, but if they had a camp within ten miles, he would be able to see the smoke of their camp-fires, and they would thus be enabled to keep out of sight of the camp.

The day was ideal for travelling over the plains. The booming of prairie-chickens was heard everywhere, flocks of ducks and wild geese were swimming about on the sloughs, the little brown gophers were chasing one another, like boys playing tag, and tall sandhill cranes stalked about near the sloughs and uttered their wild calls.

In one of the wooded ravines, which they

crossed, Joe killed a deer; and near a marsh the boys secured a big fat goose. Once they saw a small herd of buffaloes in the distance, and as they crossed a rise they surprised a herd of elk. When Joe let the boys try a long range shot at them the whole herd broke in a wild run for the timber near the Missouri. They saw also several small bands of antelopes, and watched many short-legged, wabbling badgers dig large holes in quest of gophers.

Rather early in the afternoon they made camp near a water-hole, which was really a large buffalo-wallow, but at this time was filled with good water for the horses and mules. The men brought water and wood from a ravine near by, and the young grass furnished plenty of feed for the animals.

Venison, broiled over a bed of live coals, furnished the evening meal for the men, while the boys feasted on wild goose, roasted on a spit of green willow.

Joe and the boys staked out their horses, but the men did not picket theirs till dark.

Joe had another argument with the men about guarding camp through the night, the traders claiming it was not necessary, because they had seen no sign of Indians all day.

Finally the two boys volunteered to guard camp till midnight, while Joe stood through the dangerous hours of early morning, the favorite time of Indians for making their raids.

On the second day, the travellers turned so far away from the Missouri that they found no wood, but had to use buffalo chips for cooking their meals.

On the third day, Joe discovered some pony tracks crossing the sand of a dry run, but as a shower had passed over the country since the tracks were made it was impossible to tell how old they were.

The traders were of the opinion that they were made by wild ponies, but Joe felt sure that the tracks indicated that Indian horsemen had crossed the run. He strongly urged the men to stay close together and not let one of the wagons straggle behind, and

not to do any shooting and hunting till they had reached the Souris.

The scrawny lot of horses which Joe had bought travelled and acted very well. The boys also stood up well under the hardship of travel and camping and each said he had never had such a good time in his life, and the plains beat Boston all hollow.

The weather also was fine. The cottonwoods, willows, and other bushes of the coulées and ravines showed the first signs of new foliage, while the prairie hills were still dotted far and wide with the delicate lavender of the wild crocuses, the first conspicuous spring flowers of the great interior plain.

Only one thing worried Joe. The carelessness of the traders. They would not picket their horses and they would not stand guard at night without much unpleasant wrangling.

"When we reach Mouse River," Joe confided to the boys, "I think we shall strike out on our own trail and let these fellows look out for themselves. My only hope is

that we may reach the river without any bad luck. Do not ride with Ritman and Lester, if they fall behind again, and start shooting at antelopes as they did this afternoon. It is playing a dangerous game."

CHAPTER VII

AT BAY

In the afternoon of the fourth day, they were approaching the Souris. At least Joe thought that the valley with the patches of timber which they saw in plain view about three miles ahead must be the valley of the Souris or Mouse River.

On this river Joe expected to find a good camping-place, and if he discovered no signs of hostile Indians, he intended to get some fresh meat, for he felt quite sure that both elk and deer would be plentiful in the groves of timber, and he thought he might even be able to secure a fat young buffalo.

Hank and Don were riding in the wagon with Ritman and Lester, for these two men had taken a liking to the boys. But as the travellers approached the river valley, Joe asked the lads to mount their horses and ride with him at the head of the train, for ever

since he had discovered the pony tracks, Joe had kept up a sharp lookout for Indians.

Descending into the valley of the Souris, Joe stopped the first wagon in a grove of scattered young cottonwoods. When some ten or fifteen minutes elapsed before the second wagon hove in sight over the low bluff, Joe became uneasy. He listened intently for sounds from the wagon, but a strong wind was blowing the wrong way and not a sound of the wagon or the two men was to be heard. What could be the trouble? Could they have lost a package and returned for it? That had happened several times, because the two young fellows were careless about loading the bales and boxes. Perhaps they had even stopped the wagon again, and on their saddle-horses, had chased after some antelopes as they had done on several occasions. Joe muttered something to himself about overgrown kids, who had no business on the plains, and he vowed in his mind that he would travel no farther in the company of men who would not use ordinary caution.

Just then, it seemed to him as if he heard

some shots in the direction he had come. Don also thought he had heard shooting.

"Come on, boys!" Joe called to Hank and Don, "we must see what detains them."

The sight which met Joe, as he looked over the bluff, almost froze the blood in his veins.

A few hundred rods back on the trail, the wagon lay turned over. The goods were scattered on the ground, the mules were cut loose, and a troop of painted Sioux were plundering the boxes and bales. Ritman and Lester were nowhere to be seen, but half a mile east some Indians were chasing two riderless horses.

Joe knew at once that his worst fears had more than come true. As fast as their horses could carry them, he and the boys were back at camp.

"Quick, men, quick!" he shouted. "Throw the goods on the ground and dig rifle-pits behind them. The Sioux will be on us in a minute. Ritman and Lester are killed!"

But the men seemed not to believe him.

They jumped on their horses and raced up the bluff. No sooner had they reached the crest of the bluff, when they turned abruptly and came racing pell-mell back to camp.

"Run, run!" they yelled. "They're coming! A hundred of them! We can't stop them!"

"Get off, you fools, and dig!" Joe shouted. "I'll shoot the first man that leaves us! Stop, Rankin, or you're a dead man!"

Joe's levelled pistol seemed to bring Rankin back to his senses. He jumped to the ground and began to help Joe and the boys in throwing a hasty barricade around the wagon and the animals, and the other three men followed his example.

"They will kill our horses and mules. We are lost!" moaned one of the men.

"Never mind the animals!" Joe commanded. "Dig, men, dig! Throw some logs on the goods! We have to make a brave stand or we are lost, every man of us!"

To the surprise of the men, the Indians did not at once rush upon them, but gave

them time to complete their rude fortification, consisting of bales and boxes of goods, a few logs and stumps, together with some dirt hastily thrown up with the two spades in the first wagon.

The Sioux had not been able to resist the temptation to plunder the rear wagon, before they pressed home their attack. Had they not done this, they could have taken the whole party by surprise, and killed every man.

But now they appeared in force on the bluff. Ten, twenty, thirty of them there might be, all naked with their faces painted for war. Most of them had guns, but a few carried bows and arrows. They seemed to be holding a council of war. A big man on a calico pony seemed to be the chief.

"Let's give them a volley!" one of the men suggested. "Our Henrys can reach them."

"No, you don't!" Joe commanded sternly. "Hold your fire till I give the word. Aim carefully at your man and drop him. It's our lives or theirs, men!"

It seemed an interminably long time before those painted Sioux warriors made a move. But, at last, they advanced. Slowly at first, but soon at a breakneck speed, yelling their terrible war-whoop and racing as if they would ride straight over and into the rude fort, in which every man lay flat with his finger on the trigger.

Now they began to scatter and circle around the fort. A few discharged their arms, but the white men had now regained their composure and did not reply. Closer and closer they came until they were within less than a hundred yards.

"Let go at them," called Joe, and a crackling volley broke from the seven concealed defenders, who uttered a yell of defiance as three Indians and two ponies fell dead or badly wounded.

"Five out of seven!" Joe tallied. "Not so bad, but we ought to do better."

The Sioux uttered a yell of rage, and withdrew out of range.

With the instinct of an experienced Indian fighter, Joe had chosen a very strong

position. The camp was so close to the river that the Indians did not dare to get between the camp and the stream, but could make their attack only from three sides, and could not completely surround the camp.

One more attack they made, but this time they were much more cautious and only one of them was hit.

They seemed to be satisfied now that the white man's camp could not be carried by assault. They withdrew to the crest of the bluff and evidently were holding another council, while two of them approached within a safe distance and called on the whites to come out and fight like men.

When these challenges brought no reply, they began to talk in sign.

"You are gophers! Dogs, squaws, coyotes in their holes. Come out. Fight. Rub you out!" That was as much as Joe could interpret of the universal language of the plains.

As the Sioux seemed to have had enough of fighting for the day, the besieged men

made use of the lull in the battle. They watered their animals, and picketed them or tied them to trees, so they could graze under the protection of the men's rifles.

Then they filled their water-pails, built a fire, and made supper; all within plain sight of the enemy.

Joe seemed to enjoy his meal as much as ever. The boys and most of the men could not eat much, but all were very thirsty. Although the water was almost as muddy as that in the Missouri, no spring water had ever tasted better to them.

Toward dusk Joe stationed two men each behind a tree, close to the river.

"If you see any Indian trying to sneak up on shore or show himself across the river, send him a ball. There will be little sleep for us men, while our friends are near. If we keep cool and alert, we may get out of this alive."

Thus far, none of the seven defenders was hurt, and only two of the mules had been wounded.

The boys wondered why the Sioux had

not aimed at the animals. "They could have hit them easily," said Don.

"That is true," assented Joe. "But they expect to ride them, after they have taken our scalps."

CHAPTER VIII

A TERRIBLE DAY

THE men ate their supper without being attacked. If a stranger had viewed the scene from a distance, he might have thought that he saw a camp of white men and a camp of Indians as friendly neighbors.

The two boys and the five men who were just finishing their supper could be under no illusion, however, as to the disposition of their neighbors.

The canvas cover of the wagon was riddled with bullets and arrows, many of the trees showed the peculiar blaze made by a glancing bullet, and two of their companions, the men knew, were lying dead on the prairie.

The seven at the camp-fire had come out of the fight without a scratch, but they all realized that they were besieged by the

Sioux, and that the Indians might renew the attack at any time.

While Joe was leisurely puffing his old black campaign pipe, his mind ran rapidly over the events of the day, and then planned for the defense of to-morrow.

With the instinct and quick eye of a born Indian fighter, he detected a dangerously weak spot in their position. The nearness of their fort to the river was a source of great strength only as long as the Indians attacked on horseback. If they should be determined enough to renew the fight on foot, the position of the fort so close to the river would become a source of fatal weakness, as soon as the Indians had taken in the situation; and he had no doubt that they would take it in.

If a few Sioux warriors crawled along under the bank and behind the dead grasses and bushes until they could hide under cover of the bank between the stream and the fort, that little fort and its defenders were doomed. The Indians would hold a much stronger place than the few whites. The

fort would be completely surrounded and the defenders would not be able to hold it against a much superior number; neither could they risk a bold charge, nor could they break away with the slightest hope of saving their lives. Once let the Sioux completely surround them, and every man in that little improvised fort was doomed to be killed and scalped.

Joe thought of Major Elliot and his fourteen men on the Washita, and of Captain Fetterman and his eighty troopers who were enticed into an ambush near Fort Phil Kearney where every one of them was killed within a few miles of the whole garrison of the fort. The Sioux were no mean fighters and no mean strategists.

With a grim face Joe smoked his old pipe, while his companions sat in solemn silence around the fire, their eyes watching the bluffs, where the Sioux had disappeared from sight.

"Do you suppose they have pulled out?" Rankin asked.

"No," answered the old soldier, "that

movement is only a ruse. They are right behind the crest of the bluff hoping that we might be foolish enough to come out or try to travel.

"Do you see that rose-bush, men, just on the river bank? Right there we want to dig a good safe rifle-pit, as soon as it is fairly dark. If we let them reach a position under that bank, they have us in a trap."

"Why not begin the work at once?" asked Hank.

"Bad plan," Joe explained. "We do not want to show them what is in our mind. It is just possible that the rogues may not think of that plan, unless they see us digging."

"But they are not watching us now," Don said.

"That's where you are badly mistaken, son," Joe replied with a sad smile, thinking of the two careless youths who might have been sitting at the camp-fire. "I am sure that several of their scouts have their eyes on us this very minute. I see several suspicious looking tufts of grass. The chances

are that two Sioux eyes are peering out from under those tufts, each scout lying flat on the prairie."

The men wondered if they would be attacked during the night.

"Not very likely," Joe replied. "But I expect them to call us early in the morning, about the time those bush-sparrows wake up. They will steal horses at night, but will seldom start a fight before dawn.

"Well, let us put out the fire and tie up the animals. It is almost dark enough to begin work. No loud talking, you all understand. Work quietly, and listen for sounds outside. Remember, don't show any light of a match or pipe; it might draw a bullet."

The men worked like badgers digging in the dark, silently but fast. As two of them became tired, two others, who had been on guard on the river bank, relieved them, the boys with one man remaining on watch in the fort.

The rifle-pit, large enough for two men, was soon dug, for the soil consisted of a fine sand without any rocks.

"Now, men," Joe directed them in a low voice, "let us run a shallow zigzag trench from our fort to the pit. Then, after piling up a little more dirt around our little fort, this camp is as strong as we can make it. Any Sioux bunch that tries to drive us out will have to pay for the attempt."

About midnight, the work was completed. The men wrapped themselves in their blankets, took a drink of black coffee, and occupied their assigned places. The boys had been told to lie down and try to sleep.

The hours passed wearily, and Joe passed silently from man to man, fearing more that the men might fall asleep from sheer fatigue, than hoping to catch any sights or sounds of lurking enemies.

The ominous silence, which nearly always marks the so-called small hours of morning, seemed to settle with a kind of heavy foreboding on the lonely camp on the Souris. The horses gave an occasional grunt, one of the more restless animals would peel off a mouthful of cottonwood

bark, and some small rapids in the river seemed now to make a loud gurgling noise.

Of any human beings, the watchful sentinels could detect no sign or sound; but the call of coyotes and wolves seemed even more common than usual, and in a patch of timber across the river an owl was heard several times.

The boys had at last fallen sound asleep, being worn out by the long hard ride and the excitement of the fight.

"If I do not come out of this," Joe had told the men, "and you do, see that these boys get to their father at Bozeman."

It was now about three o'clock, and the men all knew that the next hour would tell whether the Sioux had left or were concealed around the camp. Joe shook the boys gently out of their sleep, because he feared that they might expose themselves, if startled by pistol and rifle shots.

"It's time to keep an extra sharp lookout, men," Joe cautioned. "Don't shoot wild, but don't let them come too close."

Now Rankin motioned to Joe and pointed

to a low bush. "Is that a real bush?" he asked in a low voice. "It seems to me the thing has moved since I saw it first."

Joe looked sharp at the bush. It certainly was not moving now, but there was something a little unnatural about it, because it seemed to grow straight out of the ground, and not to lean outward from a common center.

"Get down, men," Joe whispered. "Look out! Danger!" And the next moment he sent a carefully aimed ball low into the bush.

The bush jumped up, uttered a terrible yell, and fell back as if dead.

At almost the same moment there was a blaze and a crash from a dozen guns all around the small fort. Two shots were fired from low willows across the river, but no Indian had gained the bank near the fort.

"Pick them out, before they can crawl away," Joe called. "Aim carefully, each man take his own time!"

The man in the pit fired two loads of buckshot at the Sioux in the willows, and from movements in the low brush, the senti-

nel concluded that both of the Sioux in the brush were either wounded or driven out of their position, by the unexpected strength of the resistance.

In the meantime the other men had each picked his Indian. Some of these had run or crawled out of close range, and one or two had been wounded or killed. But one of the boldest of the Sioux could not be dislodged. He had reached the cover of three cottonwood trees growing very close together. Half a dozen times the defenders tried to silence him, but again and again he poked his long gun through an opening in his cover, and sent a ball into camp, one of which grazed Hank's head, who had peered over the breastwork for a second to locate a troublesome Sioux archer.

"That fellow behind the trees has got to be routed, or none of us dares to raise his head," Joe fumed. "Try to draw his fire, Rankin!"

Scarcely had the Sioux fired his gun again, when Joe, a Colt's pistol in each hand, rushed at the Sioux, and before the Indian

had time to reload his gun or spring at Joe with his knife and hatchet, it was all over with him.

Rankin, who had been trying in vain to dislodge an Indian, followed Joe's example, and rushed at his man with a pistol. But this man was quicker or less bold than Joe's man, for he broke from cover, leaving his gun behind, and rushed for the bluffs as if he was going to "steal second base." But Rankin wounded him so badly that two of his friends had to carry him out of rifle range.

This bold dash on the part of the white men caused all the Indians to break from cover and run for the hills; and for the first time since dawn, the whites dared to stand up.

The fight had really lasted only about an hour, but it seemed to the boys as if they had ducked their heads, fired, and loaded their guns for half a day. Both of the lads had had some narrow escapes. Once Don had raised his head a little too high, and Joe, calling, "Get down!" had roughly tapped

him on the crown with the butt of his rifle.

The words were scarcely uttered, when a steel arrow stuck in the butt of Joe's gun; and after that incident Don did no more careless scouting.

As soon as the men had made sure that no other Sioux were hidden around their camp, they took the animals down to water, but the man with the shotgun and two men with rifles stood behind the horses ready to discourage any Sioux who might be tempted to fire at the beasts from the willow brush across the river.

Breakfast was eaten with apparent good cheer, but there was an unmistakable undercurrent of seriousness in camp. None of them had been badly wounded. Joe and one of the traders had received flesh wounds, which might cause trouble.

Within an hour the Indians appeared again, and although they kept carefully out of range, they made it impossible for the white men to move.

Rankin proposed that they abandon the

wagon and the mules, and all try to escape on the fastest horses.

But to what place of safety could they escape? It was a hundred miles to either Bismarck, or Fort Totten on Devil's Lake, and with enraged Indians dogging their trail they could not hope to reach either place.

"No, men," Joe decided. "Our only chance of standing them off is right here. If we begin to run, we are lost."

The day wore on slowly, and although the men could take turns at sleeping, and the animals could be picketed on fresh grass, the company did not look forward with cheer to another night of watching, and a second morning of fighting. The Indians seemed to be waiting for more warriors to renew the attack. In that case, the little company could not hold out more than a day or two.

In the afternoon a sudden commotion was seen among the Sioux on the bluff. The hearts of the men beat faster. Was another dreaded war party about to join their enemies?

Soon the Indians disappeared. Some shooting was heard, and half an hour later a troop of cavalry appeared on the crest of the bluff.

The men fired their guns and cheered, and a few minutes later thirty troopers, on a scouting trip from Fort Totten, rode into camp.

CHAPTER IX

MINNEWAUKAN

THE traders had had enough of fighting Indians, and decided that the only thing for them to do was to go with the soldiers to Fort Totten. It would have been madness for Joe to do anything else, so he decided, although with much reluctance, to take the boys to Fort Totten, and there make further plans.

Before the company started for Fort Totten, the traders dug two graves on the prairie, and laid the bodies of their two comrades in their last resting-place.

The tracks of the Indian ponies showed that the Sioux had travelled for several miles parallel to the traders, but hidden from view by a rise in the ground. When the two men had left their companions to give chase to a band of antelopes, they had al-

most ridden into the midst of the Sioux, who had quickly surrounded them and cut off their retreat.

The soldiers from Fort Totten had struck the pony trail, and had thus been led to the plundered wagon. As soon as they had discovered that another wagon and a number of horses had passed on toward the river, they had followed this trail, fully expecting to find the second wagon plundered, and the owners killed. The bodies of the two men killed on the prairie they had not found; they had, in fact, not looked for them. Both traders and soldiers acknowledged that it was due to the experience, the cool head and the bravery of Washita Joe that every man of the party that started for the Souris had not been killed.

Joe, himself, did not feel at all elated by any feeling of having done a brave deed. He reviled himself for having joined the traders, for he felt that he and the boys could have travelled with so little noise and exposure that no Indians would have discovered them. The only satisfactory thing

connected with the whole trip was that he had saved the lives of four men, even if he had lost two.

The soldiers travelled about thirty miles, and camped for the night on a small lake with enough scrubby timber, box-elder, and choke-cherry to enable them to cook their evening meal.

A small herd of buffaloes was seen a mile off on the prairie, but the officer refused to let the soldiers hunt them, saying he did not propose to offer the Sioux any more chances for white scalps.

" Any man," he gave out, " that goes outside of patrol limits will bunk a month in the guard-house at Fort Totten, and live on bread and water."

The lake on which camp had been made was alkaline and the water was not fit for the men to use, although the horses and mules seemed to like it. But Joe soon found a small dry run, in which he dug a well that gave enough good water for the boys and himself, and the soldiers dug several wells for their use.

There was no bugle sounded in camp that night, and long before the soldiers were through swapping yarns and playing cards for captured Indian relics, Joe and his party were sound asleep in their blankets.

On the third evening all arrived safely at Fort Totten beautifully located on the south side of Devil's Lake, or Minnewaukan, the brackish inland sea of the present State of North Dakota.

Joe's wound had already begun to heal, but the other wounded man was sorely in need of the post surgeon.

"Don, were you badly scared in our fort on the Souris?" asked Hank before the lads fell asleep that night.

"I was," admitted Don, "when Joe rushed at the Indian with his pistol. I was afraid some of the other Sioux might shoot him."

"Oh, they are rotten poor shots!" cried Hank. "I was scared when Joe had to hit you on the head to prevent the Indian from splitting it with an arrow."

"I was more than scared stiff," Don

confessed. "I thought an Indian had hit me, and for a moment I thought I was dead.

"Say, Hank! I would not be afraid to cross the plains with Joe and you. Joe can think and fight at the same time. Wasn't he quick about making a fort? And didn't he nail that Indian before anybody had time to think what he was going to do? I bet none of the traders would have dared to go after that Indian. It takes a soldier to fight Indians.

"Hank, I hope we stay here long enough to explore this big lake. It is fine to swim in, Joe says, because it is salt like the sea. No, not really salt, but ——"

"Alkaline." Hank helped him over the hard word.

"I went down to taste it. It is mighty bad stuff to drink. It tastes like soap-suds, and salt in lemonade, the way we fixed Bert Stratton's lemonade last year on the Fourth.

"Hank, you are asleep; you didn't hear me. Wake up!"

"Oh, let me alone," drawled Hank. "I am sleepy. Tell me to-morrow."

Joe's arm did not heal as quickly as the old soldier had expected. It became badly inflamed, and for several days it looked as if Joe might lose his arm. For a week he had to stay in the fort hospital and after he was out again, he had to keep quiet and was not allowed by the surgeon to go on any exploring trip with the boys.

Minnewaukan, Devil's Lake, as the white people have crudely called it, is a body of water, which would arouse the exploring instinct of any real boy.

It is a lake of numerous bays and peninsulas, where one might be lost for days. The moisture which the lake gives to the air, the protection from running prairie fires, and the fine soil around it, have produced groves and stretches of timber, oaks, elm, linden, and box-elder, with many vines and shrubs as underbrush that make one forget that he is on the great plain and not in the big woods, six hundred miles to the southeast in Minnesota or Wisconsin.

The strange atmosphere of the region caught hold of the boys at once. It seemed as if this great lake with all its summer charm had been laid down here on the plain by a special act of God. Maybe the Great Spirit had made it for the Indian and the buffalo. The buffaloes had left, but there were still about a thousand friendly Indians near the lake and the fort.

Many questions the boys asked which Joe found it hard to answer: If the water that ran into the lake was not alkaline, why was the lake alkaline? If the lake had no outlet, why did it not run over?

On this last question Joe caught the boys fairly and squarely.

"You fool youngsters," he came back at them, "can't you see that the lake isn't full yet? Don't you know that a pan can't run over till it's full?"

It did not help the boys to ask why the lake was not full. Joe could not be drawn out.

"Get out of here, you ragamuffs!" he called with mock anger. "Go walk around

the lake and find out. Get out of here! so I can finish this game of checkers in peace.

"Go and catch us some pickerel for supper. I am getting tired of the mess-cook's salt beef. You did not catch a thing yesterday."

"It was too windy; we couldn't go out," Hank explained.

But Joe would not take an excuse.

"That's the time they bite best," he insisted. "You fellows had better fish while you may. When we get away from here to the Bad Lands, and the Little Missouri, you will have no chance to fish."

"Aren't there any fish in the Little Missouri?" Don popped out.

"Oh, lots of them, I reckon, but the water is so muddy, they can't see the hook. Skinny, hand me that whip! I'll see if I can't clear this shack of quizzing brats!"

The boys rushed out of the shack in mock fright. "We'll catch you a mess of sticklebacks, a bushel of sticklebacks!" Don yelled.

The boys did go and catch a mess of pick-

erel, enough to make a meal for a dozen hungry men.

Why no other game fish but pickerel were to be found in Devil's Lake, was another puzzle to the boys. How did the pickerel and the sticklebacks get into the lake?

Some of these questions the boys asked at Lake Minnewaukan have puzzled even present-day scientists.

But if a boy wishes to know how fish get into almost any stream or lake or pond, he must turn explorer like the fishes themselves. He must not be afraid of the muddy roads and soft fields of early spring, for that is the time when the different kinds of fish go to explore and stock new waters if any have arisen. Many lose their lives in these annual explorations, but the great impulse of life urges them on, even as the human land-seekers pressed on and on over the Santa Fé and Oregon Trails.

As soon as the snow has melted and the streams are free from ice, pickerel and suckers and minnows and other fishes begin

to run up-stream. They reach every body of water, unless some sheer waterfall or dam stops them. Different kinds of minnows and small dogfish will wriggle up a run not bigger than a man's thumb.

Every boy and girl has seen something of the migration of robins and other birds, but the real scouts turn out and see the migration of the little fishes up streams and over meadows and even over plowed fields. It goes on around us over the whole broad continent every spring, but how many boys and girls have ever seen it?

In some such way, the pickerel and the stickleback and other fish must have reached Minnewaukan, a very long time ago, when the lake may have had an outlet to some tributary of the Missouri.

CHAPTER X

A BAD NIGHT

If the soldiers were inclined to complain about the mess, the boys did not; they just ate, explored and slept. The life on the oasis of woods and lake on the great plains was one of pure delight. The sunset gun, taps, and reveille soon came to be beloved sounds to the lads. The soldiers themselves were a happy, care-free lot! "Boys in uniform," Joe used to call them.

They had only one grudge against Uncle Sam; they did not like garrison duty. They hoped they would get orders to join Custer and Forsyth, or anybody on the Yellowstone.

"What is the use," they reasoned, "of our sticking here with a bunch of friendly Indians?" If they had felt sure that Custer and Forsyth would take them in, many would have deserted to reënlist on the Yel-

lowstone or at Fort Lincoln. Some of the men had seen service at Fort Phil Kearney and in the country of the old Santa Fé and Oregon Trails, and they were great story-tellers, but they delighted in "stuffing the boys" with all kinds of wild tales, as Joe called it.

Old Cactus Pete was the worst of those, who could so adroitly mix facts and fancy that even Joe could not always tell whether Pete was giving rein to his imagination or was telling one of those true tales of the plains that make the Arabian Nights seem like rather tame stories.

The boys were inclined to believe him word for word until one day, Don asked him what made the hill known as Devil's Heart stand up all alone on the prairie.

"That thar mountain," replied Pete after a moment's thought, "hasn't been thar very long. When I first passed here, ten years ago, on a buffalo hunt with Slim and Rattlesnake Jim, it warn't thar at all. It riz up in a big earthquake the year we was away fighting in the wagon-box at Fort Phil Kearney.

When I seen it first it was a part of the lake, a big hole, a hundred feet deep I should say."

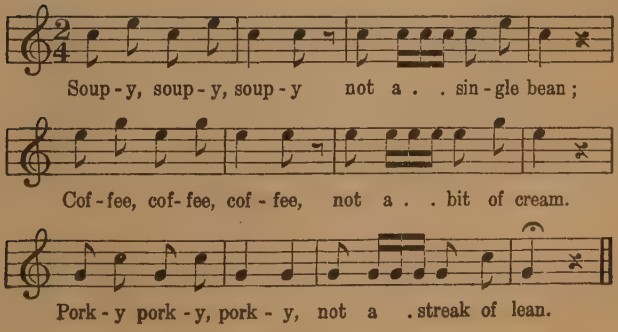
"You fought in a wagon-box?" asked Hank, passing by the remarkable origin of Devil's Heart.

"Yes, we sure fought them in the wagon-box," insisted Cactus Pete.

"How did the Indians get into the wagon-box?" queried Don doubtingly.

"They warn't in the wagon-box," Pete explained, "but believe me, boys, them Injuns tried powerful hard to get in!"

Just then the bugle sounded:



"Mess call!" exclaimed Don, and away he was without pressing any farther his in-

quiry about Devil's Heart and the fight in the wagon-box.

When after dinner the boys mentioned the origin of Devil's Heart to Joe, their friend laughed outright.

"Boys," he said, "Pete has filled you up again. That mountain is a good deal older than Adam I reckon. Some day Cactus Pete will tell you that he was there when God made the world, and you fellows will believe him.

"Don't you know yet that Pete is the biggest liar at Fort Totten?"

"Why do they call him Cactus Pete?" Don wondered.

"Ask him yourself," Joe suggested. "If he likes you well enough, maybe he will tell you. Ask him after supper some night, when his pipe is drawing well."

"Pete says Slimmy also saw the hole where Devil's Heart is now," Don objected rather mildly.

"Slimmy?" Joe burst out laughing again. "Slimmy will swear to anything Pete claims to have seen.

"It's all right, lads, to let these old boys forget their troubles in telling you their big yarns, but use your head a little when you listen to them."

The boys mentioned the fight in the wagon-box with some hesitation, for it seemed about as improbable as the story about the origin of Devil's Heart.

To their surprise Joe affirmed that there had been such a battle. "And that is one story Pete cannot exaggerate," he added.

In the afternoon the boys went out fishing. The lake was so full of pickerel in those days, that the boys could catch a mess in almost any likely-looking bay, and for that reason they explored a new part of the lake on almost every fishing trip.

On this occasion, they paddled west along shore for several miles and then crossed over to the north side of a lake, where they had never fished. They took some lunch with them so that they would not have to return before dark; because, as every boy knows, although mother and sister will not always

believe it, fish do sometimes not bite till just before sunset.

The boys had bought of an Indian a birch-bark canoe, the only one brought to Fort Totten from Minnesota, for the large straight birches that furnish the white bark for canoes do not grow in the woods at Minnewaukan or anywhere in North Dakota. The boys were very proud of the way they had learned to handle this real Indian craft, and took very good care of it. Their canoe enabled them to go wherever they wanted, and made possible many a short cut by carrying it across ridges and necks of land.

The birch-bark canoe has always been the means of travel used by the Indians of the great interior region of lakes and rivers, from the Atlantic coast to the Red River.

The Plains Indians, before they had horses, had to travel on foot. For crossing rivers or going long distances down-stream, they used bull-boats, which were really big round baskets covered with a buffalo skin.

When Hank and Don reached the North

Bay, it was almost supper-time, at least Don's stomach said it was, although Hank claimed the sun said it was not more than four o'clock.

No day can be more enchanting than a summer day in the wild groves and on the bays of Minnewaukan, and no warm sea-beach or shaded swimming-hole can call more insistently to a boy than the summer ripples of Minnewaukan, the alluring inland sea of the Land of the Dakotas.

"We don't have to fish," suggested Don. "Let us have a swim first."

If you are only an indifferent swimmer, you should try the water in Lake Minnewaukan. A long time ago, the Great Spirit put much medicine into its basin. The water of Minnewaukan is not good to swallow, but it is the best of all lakes for swimming; it buoys up the swimmer like the salt water of the ocean.

How the lads revelled in the warm ripples, how they struck out into deep water or dived to the bottom, which is covered with a soft carpet of a strange grassy water plant,

wherever the water is not too deep for plant growth.

"Time to come out," Hank called at last. "I guess it is supper-time now. We left our drinking-water at the landing. I will find a spring or dig a well and start the fire. You try to catch a few pickerel for supper."

Hank soon found a spring and had a fire of driftwood over a small fireplace of rocks, the kind that do not burst when they are heated. Don came ashore with two pickerel, which he quickly enclosed in a cast of wet clay and placed in a bed of live coals in Hank's fireplace. Both lads were, by this time, pretty good Indians, which means that they could find food, water, and shelter wherever these prime necessities of all life existed.

The fish came out of their skins as clean and white as if a Southern colored cook had planked them on a sweet board of maple wood. Hot, sweet tea, bacon, bread, and pickerel baked in Indian style, furnished the boys a meal so tasty, that even Aunt Sara in Boston could not have done better, except

for a pudding or a pie, which one should not expect in camp.

There were few dishes to wash, because the boys never took anything but two cups and a tin pail. After supper they caught a mess of fish and then watched several wild ducks and geese with their broods of young.

In a marsh close by, the large golden-headed blackbirds, among the show birds of the plains, sang their strange, reedy matin chorus, a song that sounds like an evolution of the music of the west wind in the dry reeds.

A pair of night-hawks objected vigorously to the presence of the lads. They screamed and swooped down on them with that strange whirr of wings, which is quite terrifying to one who does not know that the night-hawk is but a harmless cousin of the whippoorwill, and like the whippoorwill, never kills or harms anything bigger than bugs and moths and other flying insects.

The boys looked hard for the eggs or the young, but if either were present among the scant grass on the stony ground, they

blended so completely with their surrounding that it was impossible to find them by looking for them.

"Let us go home by moonlight," suggested Don. "Joe won't care. He said he would hang out a lantern, if we were not home by dark."

Hank was only too willing to stay out as long as possible. So they played about on the beach, skipped stones on the water and listened again to the call of ducks and rails and the reedy song of the golden-heads.

Mixed in with the chorus of the golden-heads was a strange little watery song, which, Don said, sounded as if the bird has his bill full of gravel and water, "Zid-zid-zid-zidderee" the little songster seemed to say over and over again. The lads waded into the marsh and found that the song came from a small marsh-wren with a long, slender bill.

Neither the golden-heads nor the marsh-wrens were at all alarmed. "Look around," they seemed to say. "We don't often have callers. Make yourselves at home."

The boys soon found the odd nest of the marsh-wren. In fact, they found many of them, looking like mouse-nests made of balls of dry grass. Many of them seemed to be dummies, at least they were empty, and the lads could not understand why the birds had built them; nor have bird students even of this day learned the secret.

When the sun had set and the fireflies began to light up the marsh and the meadow with a thousand darting sparks, the lads built a big camp-fire of driftwood and sat talking of Boston and of their father in far-away Bozeman.

After an hour they poured water on the fire and started for camp. When they had passed the shelter of the timber they noted that a fresh breeze had sprung up, and when they reached the lake, the whitecaps had begun to show, and black clouds were piling up in the west, looking quite terrifying, as sheets of sharp streaks of lightning played over the dark background.

"I don't like the looks of those clouds," Hank said. "Perhaps we had better run

back in the bay. We could sleep under the canoe and go home in the morning."

"We can make it in an hour and a half, if we run straight for the landing. Joe will hang out a lantern for us; but he will be worried if we don't come home," Don suggested.

When they had been going half an hour, they found that wind and waves were rapidly increasing, for the west wind has a long sweep over the main body of Lake Minnewaukan.

"We had better turn back or strike out for shore," said Don. "I am afraid we can't make it."

"We can't turn around now," replied Hank, "and if we go in the troughs of the waves, we'll get swamped. Pull hard! I'm afraid the storm will catch us."

By this time it was dark. Pitch dark, the boys would have called it, if they had had either breath or time left to talk. Both were pulling on their paddles as hard as they could. They knew that they were making a run for their lives.

Hank did not look for any lantern at the landing. He was no longer trying to reach the landing at the fort, he was doing his utmost to keep the canoe headed with the wind and to make shore; just make shore anywhere.

But only when the lightning flashed, could he see the black fringe of woods still three miles ahead.

"Drop your paddle and bail! Bail her out!" he shouted to make himself heard through the wild roar of waves and thunder. "She is filling!"

Don bailed and bailed, till his arms felt numb, but still he kept on bailing. If he could keep the canoe afloat, they might still reach shore, for they were fairly flying along before the wind.

Suddenly there was a heavy thud. The canoe came to a dead stop. A rock pushed through the bottom of it; the boys fell forward, and the furious waves rushed over them.

"Get out!" shouted Hank, as soon as he had his head above water again. "We

struck the boulder reef and smashed her!"

Some large black rocks loomed up a few yards ahead. Half stumbling and half swimming, both lads made for the big rocks and clung to them.

"Take your belt off!" Hank called. And by tying his and Don's belt together, he made a rope to throw around the projecting rock.

"Now catch hold of the life rope!" he called. "If you're washed off, you'll drown!"

Every minute the wild uproar grew wilder. Again and again a big swashing wave rolled its white foam clear over the rock and the heads of the lads, lifting the boys off their feet one second and setting them down again the next. They gulped a mouthful of air, when their heads were above the waves, and held their breath while the next wave rushed over them.

And then the clouds opened, and the rain poured down, whipped into a whirling spray by the gale.

EVERY MINUTE THE WILD UPROAR GREW WILDER.—*Page 108.*

For a moment the boys despaired; but before they realized it, the fury of the waves was broken by the splashing rain. They still swished and rushed madly over the reef, but they no longer broke over the heads of the boys. It was as if some divine power had said, "Thou shalt not roll higher!"

The boys had never before observed this apparent miracle of nature, but any man whose life has ever been endangered on a wild wind-swept lake, knows that a pouring rain will break the tumultuous roll of the whitecaps.

Within half an hour, although it seemed many times that long to the marooned boys, the waves had subsided much; and in an hour, the lake was almost quiet.

It was only now that the lads had time to think from how great a danger they had escaped.

"I thought we were headed half a mile south of this reef," said Hank; "and I did not see it before we crashed down on it."

"It was our luck to strike the reef," Don replied. "We never could have reached

shore, for I could not have bailed much longer.

"Couldn't we swim to shore now? I am getting awfully chilled."

"We would never make it, Don," Hank objected. "It is two miles to the nearest shore on the north side, and we are too much exhausted. We could never make it. We just have to stay here till daylight.

"Sit down in the water," suggested Hank after a while. "It is much warmer than the air. It is a shame to worry Joe and all our friends. They must think we are drowned."

"Maybe they think we camped on shore with a nice big fire," Don suggested.

"Well, they might give us credit for more sense than we had," admitted Hank. "We shall never hear the last of this reef."

Don had not realized that a night could be so long. The boys waded and swam around on the reef, they sat down in the water, and for a change, climbed on the rock, but it seemed as if morning would never come. Once, while sitting down and leaning against the rock, Don fell asleep and

tumbled headlong into the water, from which he arose spitting and blowing, much to the amusement of his older brother.

"Why don't you wade into deep water and close your mouth if you wish to dive?" Hank joked at his expense.

"Ah, shut up!" Don replied angrily. "You smashed the canoe."

"Yes, and you did not want to camp on shore, Crosspatch," retorted Hank, still laughing at the accident of Don.

It was still dark when they saw a light moving about on shore near Fort Totten. Then the light settled down low on the water and seemed to be coming toward the reef.

"It's Joe, it's Joe!" Don called, "coming after us with a boat. Brr! I'm cold!"

Now a gun was fired from the boat and the boys yelled in reply as loud as they could.

The boat came nearer, but it seemed to be going very slowly. Now another gun was fired, and again the boys yelled their best in reply.

Never had the boys watched anything as intently as they watched that light creeping slowly over the water. But horrors! The boat was not headed for the reef. It would pass at least half a mile south of them.

When the boat came opposite the reef, a faint gray light began to spread over the water, and the lads thought they could make out the shape of two men. Another shot was fired from the boat, which was now passing them at a good rate of speed.

Again the lads used their lung power to the utmost, but the boat kept on its course.

Hank stripped off his shirt, climbed on the rock, yelled his loudest and waved the shirt frantically over his head.

"Here!" exclaimed Don, "take my shirt, too." And once more both lads shouted, Don in a shrill soprano, Hank in a manly bass; but the boat kept on its course.

"Give them the Sioux war-whoop!" cried Don.

"Ki-yi! Ki-yi, Ki-yi," both screamed with all their might, and Hank waved his shirts

so violently that he slipped and tumbled backward into the lake.

"They heard it! They heard it!" cried Don, at the same time having his laugh at his brother's mishap. "They're coming, Hank! It is Joe and Cactus Pete."

"What in all tarnation business are you blooming kids doing on this reef?" cried Joe when he came within speaking distance.

"Where is your canoe?" asked Cactus Pete.

"I don't know," Hank admitted humbly. "I smashed it right here on the rocks."

"Where are your guns?"

"In the lake here, on the reef somewhere," Hank answered glumly. "We hunted for them, but we couldn't find them."

"Well, I'll be darned," Joe expressed his feelings, "if you aren't the foolest kids I ever saw. Why, in thunder, didn't you stay on shore? I'm going to ship you right back to Boston. I would never get you alive to Bozeman anyhow.

"Hop in, now. Pete, we had better take them home, pour some hot coffee into them,

and put them to bed. They look pretty blue around the gills. We can hunt for the guns and the canoe some other time."

A group of soldiers and Indians was waiting on shore when the boat landed. All seemed to be glad that the boys were alive, but that was as far as their sympathy went. The soldiers laughed and their remarks contained nothing flattering to the shipwrecked lads, Joe's Boston kids, as the soldiers called them.

The Indians laughed even more than the soldiers when they understood where the boys had spent the night.

"Fool white boys!" remarked old Black Thunder. "Go on Minnewaukan in storm. Indian camp on shore."

CHAPTER XI

THE TEMPTATION

CACTUS PETE had become so much interested in the boys that he wanted to go out on the same day and look for the canoe and the guns, but Joe thought they had better take the boys along for that purpose; somebody might have to do a little diving on that errand.

The boys had never found dry clothing, a warm room, and a hot breakfast quite so agreeable, for when they landed they were so shivering with cold that they could hardly walk to their cabin.

When the bugler sounded mess call for dinner, they were still sound asleep; and they would have missed supper also, if Joe had not called them.

Toward five o'clock Joe aroused them.

"Get up now, boys," he told them. "The bugler will call supper pretty soon."

"Call supper?" Don asked rubbing his eyes. "Did we miss dinner? I sure slept some."

Next morning the lads and their two friends began to look for the canoe and the guns. Joe had expected to find the canoe on shore, probably smashed beyond repair, but there was no canoe to be seen, although they made a careful search for it.

"Where did you lose your guns?" asked Pete.

"They were in the canoe when we struck," the boys claimed.

"Joe," Cactus Pete suggested, "the canoe must have been swept off the reef into deep water. I calculate that it is lying somewhere on the bottom, with the guns in it."

So they rowed to the reef and, with a hook fixed to a long pole, they began to drag for the canoe, and after a good deal of work, they raised the canoe out of ten feet of water. Both guns were still in the canoe, which had one large hole in the bottom.

Old Chief Black Thunder found a piece

of birch bark, which his squaw had brought from Minnesota, and showed the boys how to patch the hole, so the canoe would be as good as before. The only things which the boys did not recover were their hats and their fishing tackle. Their hats had been blown off long before the canoe struck the reef, and the boys never saw them again.

Cactus Pete told them that it was lucky for them that they had struck the reef. If they had not, they surely would have lost their valuable guns, and he doubted very much that they could have drifted to shore by holding on to the swamped canoe, even if they had had presence of mind enough to throw their guns overboard.

"Don't you ever go on this lake again," he warned them, "when a storm is coming up."

The traders, after recovering from their scare on the Souris, decided to start east for Minnesota; where they hoped to sell their goods to the friendly Chippewas east of Red River. The commander of the fort, partly

to see them safely off and partly to keep his men in condition, furnished them an escort for the first fifty miles, and that was the last seen of them.

For Joe and his boys the stay at Lake Minnewaukan turned out to be much longer than they had expected; for the commander refused to let them start for Montana without direct orders from the Department Headquarters at St. Paul.

There was no telegraph connection between Fort Totten and St. Paul in those days, and the mail came through very slowly and irregularly.

" If you and the boys will give your word not to leave without a permit, you can stay here," the commander told them, " otherwise I shall send you back east with the traders."

It was a hard choice for Joe and his boys.

" Why don't you start with the traders?" the post saddler suggested to Joe. " After the escort has left you, you can turn around and start for Montana, and the commander will know nothing about it. These officers think they are running the country."

Joe bit his moustache and looked at the boys, and the boys looked at him.

"We would like to start awfully well, Old Knives. But your way wouldn't do. Would it?"

"Why wouldn't it?" the old saddler argued. "I don't think Colonel Hunt would care, if he knew. If you are in a hurry to get away, that's the way to do it."

"It won't do, Gill. It won't do!" Joe decided. "The captain's men saved our lives, he has his orders and he is much concerned about our safety. We can't do anything underhanded against him."

"Joe, you are the most squeamish fellow I ever met. I suppose you wouldn't even desert, no matter how dead things were in an old fort like this."

"No, you bet I would not," Joe flashed back at the old man. "I enlisted twice and stuck out my time, but life was not dull while we were with Custer."

"Well, I think you are foolish," the old saddler persisted. "Who cares, anyhow?"

"That's the way a lot of you fellows talk,"

Joe retorted, getting angry. "Who cares? What's the difference? If nobody else cares, every man himself should care, whether he is doing an honorable thing or a sneaky thing."

"All right, Joe," Gill came back with a final remark. "I can't see it as you do. I am off to my shop."

Joe talked the prospects over with the boys and they agreed with him that the plan Gill had suggested was underhanded.

So they gave their word to Colonel Hunt, and the traders started for Red River without Joe and his boys.

On the evening of the fourth day, the soldiers who had escorted the traders returned to Fort Totten. They had seen several small parties of Indians, who had, however, not come within hailing distance. Whether they were friendly hunting parties from the Devil's Lake Reservation, or whether they belonged to the renegade bands in Manitoba, the soldiers did not know.

With the next mail Colonel Hunt received a letter from Walsh Rankin. The traders

had safely reached the settlements east of the Red River, but not without more fighting. Some Indians had run off all their extra horses, and they had barely saved their goods and their lives.

"If Joe and his Boston boys still wish to cross the Sioux country to Bozeman, we wish them joy and happiness," the letter ended. "We are glad to be back among white people with our scalps still on."

CHAPTER XII

CACTUS PETE

To say that Joe and the boys were always glad that they had not left with the traders would not be telling the truth.

"Durn it all, Pete," Joe one day gave vent to his impatience while talking to his old friend, "this is the longest I have ever been under arrest in all my born years. I almost wish I had enlisted again, then my time would be laid out for me and I would know what to do. I wonder if the Colonel would mind if the boys and I went out scouting and hunting now and then with the soldiers?"

Cactus Pete soon came with word that the Colonel would be glad to have Joe and the boys go with the soldiers, whenever they felt like it.

The boys as well as Joe made frequent use of this permit, and the boys learned

much about the plains and about the men with whom they travelled.

It was at the evening camp-fire on one of these scouting trips that Cactus Pete told the boys how he came by his nickname.

"It was in the Yellowstone campaign of 1873 under Stanley. I was carrying dispatches to Fort Buford. The country was dangerous, and I had gone alone because one man can conceal himself so much better than two or three. I had provisions for four days and rode the best horse in my company. The first two days out I was pretty careful. I lay up during the day, like an owl, and travelled at night. I saw many Indians. The country seemed to be alive with them. Once I thought they had me. I had laid up for the day in some willows in a ravine not more than fifty yards from a spring.

"Late in the afternoon I suddenly saw five or six Indians come down from the prairie into the ravine. They were on foot, but were all armed, and I figured that they had left their horses and were coming to the spring for a drink. My horse was grazing

near the willows, in plain sight from the spring.

"It did not take me long to hustle that horse under cover. Then I lay down to watch. If they came to that little willow thicket, they could not help almost running into me.

"They looked at the spring and talked. 'Somebody has been here!' that is what they said, I reckon. Fortunately the ground near the spring was stony and showed no tracks, and I had taken care not to make any sort of a trail to my camp. Oh, I was mighty careful on that trip.

"They all took a drink, and then sat down to smoke. Believe me, no smoke ever lasted so long to me. At last they arose. That was the moment I had my rifle ready and my pistols handy. If they were on foot, they would come down the trail through the willows and couldn't help discovering me.

"They went the other way, and I knew they were a party on horseback. I had been thinking of starting a small fire for cooking supper, just before I saw them against the

sky on the edge of the ravine. I decided that a little fire in my old pipe was all the fire I really wanted that evening."

"That was the time you were scared, Pete," Joe bantered his old friend.

"It was one of the times, but not the only time," Pete frankly admitted. "But at this place I had plenty of time to get over being scared and plan what to do."

"What could you have done, if they had come down the trail?" asked Joe.

"Turned the game on them!" replied Pete grimly. "They were all painted for war, but I saw them first, and I could shoot seven times without reloading."

Then Pete told how he had travelled all night, and the next morning had laid up in a place where it was possible to slip away in more than one direction.

"During the day I gave Bones, that was the name of my horse, the last oats I had taken along, for I expected to make Fort Buford by morning. I crawled up to a ridge several times and scouted in regular Indian fashion by lying flat on my stomach

and peering long in every direction. But not a sign of Indians could I discover. No smoke, no tepee, no horsemen or ponies, no game running as if hunters had disturbed it.

" So I built a small fire and cooked me a good supper, and about sunset I started on the last stretch for Fort Buford.

" When it was getting dusky, I was jogging along at a good gait and sort of congratulating myself that I had done a right smart thing, and that I would be twenty-five dollars better off for carrying the dispatches.

" Just before I turned the corner of some rocks I stopped to listen. I heard some noise, but thought it came from buffaloes or elk; and the next moment half a dozen Sioux were almost on top of me. I think there were about six of them, but I took no time to count them. ' The same bunch looking for you!' it flashed through my mind. Well, before they could surround me or make a rush at me, I fired my rifle at them and a couple of pistol shots, so as to give me a start for a place where I could make a stand, half a mile back.

" But Bones had gotten scared. Maybe he was hit, too, for it seemed to me the whole gang fired at us at once. Anyway, I could not control him. He dashed wildly up a ravine with me, stumbled over some hole or rock, and I was pitched over his head and landed flat on my back in a cactus-bed among a jumble of rocks.

" I have always been surprised that I did not let out a yell. But, at first, I reckon I was too excited and then I was too scared.

" Bones got up right away. But he didn't wait for me, and two reds dashed after him and caught him. Twice they passed me so close that I felt they would see me, but they didn't. It was getting pretty dark and the rocks kind of hid me from sight.

" They hurried away with Bones, and I guess he hasn't eaten any oats since."

" Didn't they come back to look for you? " asked Don.

" No; their natural caution saved my life. Those who caught Bones must have been very young men, for an old warrior would have reasoned that I had dismounted and

concealed myself, and he would have followed me into that gulch.

"As soon as I felt safe, I picked myself off the cactus-bed. After a while I found my rifle and crept out of the gulch the other way. I was terribly sore, but I reached Fort Buford the next day; where the surgeon and my friends took me in hand."

"Pretty near bedtime, lads," Pete remarked after a while. "Good-night, boys! I hope you will not dream of rattlesnakes or cactus-beds!"

CHAPTER XIII

WORSE PROSPECTS

In this way the lads put in their time very profitably. Not only did they become seasoned horsemen and scouts; they also learned a good deal about the Indians and their ways, for about one thousand Sioux, all supposed to be friendly, lived at that time on their reservation at Devil's Lake.

Altogether, about 20,000 Sioux were already at that time living on various reservations east of the Missouri River.

It was only the Western Sioux and Northern Cheyennes who were openly hostile, and threatened to kill every white man who went upon their large reservation without their consent. And that they were ready to carry out their threat they had shown on many occasions. Why the government did not more conscientiously keep the treaty made with these tribes in 1868 has never been explained

and is one of the dark blots on the fair history of the United States.

About the first of August Colonel Hunt heard from Department Headquarters at St. Paul that the three men bound for Montana might go, but the letter stated that the commander considered such a journey at this time extremely dangerous without a strong military escort, which the department could not furnish.

By this time, however, Joe seemed no longer desirous to start.

He had become convinced that the many reports and rumors which had reached Fort Totten in various ways were only too true.

There was a steamer, the *Josephine*, exploring the Yellowstone. She had gone up as far as the mouth of the Big Horn and some forty miles beyond to Pompey's Pillar. This so-called pillar is a lone rock on which Captain Clark of the Lewis and Clark expedition had inscribed his name, "Wm. Clark, July 25, 1806." This inscription may be seen on Pompey's Tower, as Lewis and Clark called it, to this very day.

General J. W. Forsyth was on the Yellowstone with some troops. Soldiers in that country could do no good, unless they were able to inflict a crushing defeat on the hostile tribes.

What did it all mean? Was the government preparing a winter campaign? Or were all these moves preparatory for a real war against the Sioux the next year, in the summer of 1876?

Joe and Pete had long discussions about it. "If the government cannot or will not keep white men off the Sioux reservation," Pete gave as his opinion, "and the Indians will not consent to another treaty, it is high time the government shows its authority and power. As it is, the Indians are getting bolder and more desperate every day. We gave up Fort Phil Kearney, after we buried many of our best soldiers there. The Sioux know that they have reached their last buffalo grounds. White skin-hunters are slaughtering the animals by tens of thousands every year.

"If the white men are allowed to hunt on

their last big reservation, the buffaloes will be killed off. The Indians will have nothing to eat, and the old days are gone, gone forever!

"It will take a big force to compel these brave tribes to give up the wild, free life of their ancestors and live on small reservations, where they must raise stock, farm, and depend on rations from the government."

"Yes," admitted Joe sadly, "these are bad days for the free Indian. It looks as if the old days were coming rapidly to an end."

"Thar's going to be some big fights afore they come to an end," predicted Pete, falling into his Plains dialect. "If I could get into it, I sure would enlist again, but sticking around here at Fort Totten is pretty dead business."

"Pete, I have had enough of the regular Indian war since our big fight on the Washita. You know, Pete, when you surprise an Indian camp, they will all fight, men, squaws, and boys. White people would do the same. Now, I don't mind going after

these painted warriors, but having to fight squaws and boys or be killed by them, that goes against me.

"Going after these roaming bands of thieves and murderers suits me well enough. I would delight in a chance to run down Inkpadoota and his band of cutthroats, who have killed and robbed harmless whites these twenty years. They are living in Canada now, I hear, but nobody knows where they are roaming about."

"When are you going to start west with the lads?" asked Pete after a while.

"I don't know," said Joe gloomily. "I am afraid to risk the lives of the boys, for I don't think we would ever get through."

"Right you are," Pete admitted. "It was never so dangerous to cross the plains as it is now. You would be sure to fall in with parties from Canada, or from the renegades at Fort Peck in Montana. In fact, I don't trust any of them. They are all dangerous now; and the big prairie tells no tales."

"Why don't you make a dash in the win-

ter? They lie pretty low during the cold weather," suggested Pete.

"I have thought of that," Joe replied. "But I am afraid of the blizzards in this northern country. Freezing to death is as bad as being killed by Indians. Travelling in winter was bad enough down south; but it would be much worse in this country."

"An old campaigner like you could take care of himself. If a blizzard catches you, you den up till the storm is over."

"Yes, if you happen to be in a country where you can find shelter," Joe agreed. "I will think it over. Maybe a winter journey would offer our only chance of getting through."

Both sat in silence for a time. Pete's term of enlistment expired the first of November, and Joe had often wondered what the old soldier would do then. Would he enlist again? If he did, Pete would be a soldier for life. The type was not uncommon on the plains in those days. Many of them were men without near relatives or friends. The United States Army was their

family, and the lone military post on the Indian frontier was their home. Brave and hardy men they were, who cheerfully volunteered for the most dangerous duties of the service.

When explorers and surveyors needed fearless helpers, who always, and as a matter of habit, first thought of the work to be done and last of their own safety and comfort, they chose men who had served as regulars in the United States Army. These unknown regulars and the officers trained at West Point have served as a nucleus for our army in all of our wars, and the country owes them a debt, which it can never pay.

In many nameless graves all over the Great Plains these veterans are sleeping, in the cemeteries of a hundred scattered posts, in the South, in Cuba, in the Philippines, and on the battlefields of France. Honor to their ashes!

"Can our horses stand winter travel?" asked Joe after a while. "We could not carry forage for them."

"Wall," drawled Pete, "why not take

mules? You know most of the army scouts ride mules. They find their own meal at any time."

"Mules?" repeated Joe. "No mules for me. A horse is company and sort of half human; but a mule is always an ornery cross of a critter. I should be bad company if I had to ride a mule."

"All right," growled Pete. "Take horses, if mules are not stylish enough for you Boston fellows. But my advice is: take mules, if you are going to risk the journey in winter."

CHAPTER XIV

JOE IN TROUBLE

When Joe and his boys had first arrived at Fort Totten they had written to Thomas Stamford at Bozeman, telling him what had happened to interrupt their journey and informing him that they could not tell now when they would again start west.

About the middle of August Joe received an answer to his letter.

"I would not advise you," Stamford wrote, "to risk a trip across the plains from Fort Totten. As far as we can learn here, there are hunting parties and war parties of Indians everywhere. There has been a steamer on the Yellowstone with soldiers and a Gatling gun, but I fail to see that they have done any good, no more than all the other campaigns on the Yellowstone. They have only irritated and angered the Indians.

"Some people think there is going to be a

big campaign against the Sioux next summer. All I can say is that it will have to be big, if it is going to accomplish anything.

"An old trapper here, who knows many Crow and Sioux Indians, claims that the hostile Sioux and the Cheyennes can muster 5,000 warriors, and that the Indians are well armed and have plenty of ammunition. Strange as it seems, Indians can buy both good rifles and ammunition at all the government agencies east of the Missouri. And who can tell where rifles and ammunition go after they are once turned over to an Indian?

" Perhaps you could get through after the Sioux have moved into their winter camps. Otherwise you had better return to Minnesota and come by way of the Union Pacific and the stage route from Salt Lake City."

When Joe showed this letter to the boys, his doubts and troubles were in no way lessened.

Where were all the Indians that had the 5,000 warriors? the boys wanted to know. If they were camping and hunting south of the Yellowstone, the boys could not see why it would not be quite safe to travel westward on a route fifty miles north of the Yellowstone.

Joe seemed to be in an ugly mood on this day.

" There are a lot of things you youngsters don't see," he replied testily, " and a lot of things you forget.

" There are a thousand Sioux in Manitoba north of us and a thousand of them west of us on the Missouri; and there must be 15,000 of them south of the Yellowstone. These are the openly hostile tribes. There are 20,000 more, who are supposed to be friendly. Do you fellows think all these people live on grass? No, they have to hunt for their meat, for every meal of it. Have you ever thought that these people, I mean the hostiles, who receive no government rations, need about 500 buffaloes every day, or other game to take the place of the buffaloes? I suppose you fellows think they rope all this game near their camps. No, they don't. They have to roam all over the plains to find enough food. There is no more game near a permanent Indian camp than there is near a white man's town.

" So I know, even if I hadn't seen it with

my own eyes, that the country between Canada and the Yellowstone is full of hunting parties, and in these days every Sioux hunting party is a war party. If the government had set out to make the Sioux hate the white men, it could not have done any better. I am surprised that they have not all joined Crazy Horse, Gall, Sitting Bull and the other hostile chiefs."

The boys did not wish to go back to the States, they did still wish to cross the plains, although they had not thought much of the things which Joe had pointed out.

Hank asked if it would not be a good plan to engage one or two of the friendly Indians at Fort Totten to go with them.

"Oh, but could you trust them?" asked Don.

"I would not hesitate to trust them," Joe asserted. "In that respect Indians are much like white men; you must know when to trust and whom to trust.

"But I would not take an Indian along," he continued. "He would be true enough; but he would not obey orders. If we got

into a tight place he would want to run and give up the game. In that respect most Indians are a good deal like boys.

"If they can do a thing right away, they do it. But if it is hard or very dangerous, or takes a long time, they get tired of it, just like boys, and want to give it up. Indians seldom follow up an advantage in a fight unless they can do so at once."

Hank and Don looked at each other as if they felt guilty of neglecting or forgetting something.

"Yes, you fellows just take the hint," Joe laughed, "although I did not mean it as a hint. Pete says you are getting pretty lazy about hoeing his corn and potatoes. I should think you would get tired of fishing and swimming every day. A little hoeing will do you good."

"When you scouted for Custer south of the Arkansas," Don ventured, "you travelled through dangerous country all alone or with another man. We could travel pretty fast over the three hundred miles to Bozeman."

"Three hundred miles?" exclaimed Joe. "Where did you get that notion? It is six hundred miles as the crow flies and seven hundred on horseback; maybe eight hundred by the time you are there.

"Well, I have made up my mind that we will not leave before the first of October. By that time the Indians will be making their great fall buffalo hunt, or will be moving to their regular winter camps; and will not roam so much everywhere.

"Maybe, by that time we shall hear some good news; thus far we have had nothing but bad news.

"You fellows can take in the fall hunting now for ducks and geese. But *do* learn to shoot; don't waste ammunition, but start bringing in some game for the camp. Everybody in the mess is pretty tired of salt beef and pickerel. I shall write your father that we will not start until October."

CHAPTER XV

DON AT THE DOCTOR'S

During the latter part of August wild ducks, geese, and swans lose their wing feathers, and for a week or two they cannot fly. However, at this time of the year all kinds of food are abundant and by the first of September the wild millions can again sail the air on swift and strong wings; for wild ducks, geese, and swans are wonderful fliers, and seem to enjoy travelling through the crisp autumn air as much as any boy ever enjoyed playing ball.

Of feathered game, there was an abundance at that time, which to-day seems almost unbelievable.

Wild ducks are early risers. Before the last stars have quite faded away at the approach of daylight, one hears the whirr and whistle of their wings, as large and small flocks are passing to good feeding-grounds.

During the noon hours most of them seem to be taking a nap, but from the middle of the afternoon they are again in the air until after dark; for most wild birds, and animals, too, eat only two good meals a day.

Joe had fixed a few strict hunting rules for his boys. They were not to do any pot-hunting, which means that they were not to shoot any birds sitting on the water. And they were not to waste ammunition. Every bird missed counted a mark against the hunter.

But even with these rules, it was not difficult to keep the mess table supplied with choice game, for which restaurants and hotels in Boston and New York would now charge, at least, five dollars a bird, if the law allowed them to serve and sell wild game.

The lakes and sloughs of the prairie States and provinces are the greatest breeding-places for wild ducks and geese in the world, and only hunters and naturalists realize how many kinds of wild ducks and geese are at home in North America.

On the smaller varieties, such as teal, buffle-heads, or butterballs, the lads could not afford to waste their expensive ammunition. The millions of blackbirds, snipes, curlews, and mud-hens were also too small game. Only the large well-flavored ducks: Canvas-backs, redheads, and mallards, were fair game.

At first they found it hard to recognize the birds on the wing and made many mistakes by bringing home pintails, spoonbills, and sawbills. The pintails and spoonbills look large on the wing, but have only a small body. The sawbills the boys were compelled to eat themselves. They are fish-ducks, and have the taste of their food, and the soldiers would not eat them; but it was the rule that all ducks killed must be brought home and eaten.

It is easy to distinguish the twenty or more kinds of wild ducks in a museum or on good pictures, but it took the boys a week to tell them by their field marks at a distance.

Most of their duck-hunting the boys did on good passes, where low bushes furnished

natural blinds, and where they did not lose their birds in dense rushes and tall grass.

The big, honking geese were much more difficult to get. They are far more wary than ducks, and generally fly too high to be brought down with a shotgun. Again and again, the young hunters fired at them as the long honking lines passed over; only to hear the shot click harmlessly on the big wings, while the great wavy line passed on without a break; for wild geese generally fly in lines with a V-shaped hook in front. Why they fly in this manner is not known.

With one big wild gander, Don had an experience which made him the butt of a good many jokes on the part of Cactus Pete and the other soldiers of the mess.

Don had dropped the bird in some low bushes, and as it was the first goose he had brought down, he ran eagerly to pick it up. But the big gander had only been winged, and before Don could secure him, the viciously striking goose split one of Don's ears almost in two.

The wound looked so serious and bled so

freely that Hank tied it up with his handkerchief and hurried the young hunter home to the surgeon.

"Well, son," said the doctor, "that is a pretty bad rip. I guess I shall have to sew the pieces together. Shall I give you some chloroform?"

Hank left the room when the doctor got his needle ready, but Don told the doctor to go ahead without any chloroform.

"If girls can have their ears pricked for earrings," he said, "I guess a fellow can stand having his ear sewed together again."

The wound healed quickly under the surgeon's care, but every morning, when Don started out for the day's hunt with his head in a fresh bandage, the jokers did not spare him.

"It would not be a bad thing," suggested Cactus Pete, "if an Indian scout had three ears."

"Right you are, Pete," one of the soldiers added. "Maybe, Don, you could find a gander who would rip the other ear for you. An Indian scout with four ears couldn't be

beat. You could hire out to General Custer for a hundred dollars a month and free horses and grub."

"Drop the chaff, men," Joe would sometimes say, when his small ward was beset too hard. "Try your wit on each other, you big sticks, and let the small boy alone." But in spite of anything Joe could do, Don never quite heard the last about the danger he was exposed to in hunting wild geese.

Cactus Pete, although he had begun to speak of "our boys," teased the lads in many ways. He delighted especially in telling his strange experiences in such a way that the boys did not always know whether he was relating facts or was testing the gullibility of his tenderfoot friends.

"Well, boys," he began one evening, "those Canada ganders are pretty dangerous songbirds, but they are harmless canaries compared with one of those large waterbirds in California and Oregon."

"What bird is that?" asked Don eagerly.

"Wall, when I lived on the coast, a

strange thing happened to a small Indian boy on Lake Tahoe."

"Pete, when were you on Lake Tahoe?" Joe asked with a warning glance.

"I was born there," Pete declared boldly. "Wall, this small Injun lad was taking a swim, when a flock of them big Western Pelicans alighted near him and began fishing. One of them scooped up this Injun lad and stored him away in his beak pouch. The lad couldn't get out nohow. He got so hungry that he had to eat some of the fish the pelican caught. Of course, he had plenty of water to drink. When old Chief Tillamook heard that a pelican had caught something so big that he couldn't fly, he sort of guessed where the lost boy was. He ordered seven of his young men to go after the bird with ropes. They lassoed the pelican and took the boy out of his beak. The lad wasn't much the worse for his experience, but when I seen him last, he still had the scar on his back, where the pelican caught him with the crook on the end of his beak."

The lads looked at Joe for a sign of dis-

approval, but Joe sat there as unmoved as an Indian chief in council.

"Now," began Pete, encouraged by his apparent success, "I'll tell you a story that I had from the mouth of the best scout that ever served the government, Jim Bridger. You know Bridger?" he asked turning to Joe, who said he had met him once.

"Wall," continued Pete, "if you ever reach the upper Yellowstone, you may find a strange river. Bridger once had to cross this river, and he took off his boots to wade across, using a spear to steady himself in the terrible current. Wall, before Jim got half across he pretty near scalded the soles of his feet, for the current was so swift that it made the bottom of the river as hot as the top of a stove. Bridger named the stream Fire Hole River.

"We started to laugh at him, but Jim swore the story was true as Gospel, but he wouldn't tell it to any eastern tenderfoot, who would call a man a liar, just because he had seen things which the wise ones in Boston haven't heard about."

Again the boys looked at Joe with questioning eyes, but Joe only remarked:

"Be a little careful, Pete, when you cross that old bridge near the barracks."

"I never cross it after dark," Pete replied, quietly taking his hat. "I always go around it. Good-night to you all."

Joe still had a smile on his face when Pete was gone.

"That last story is true," he began. "That river bed is really hot, but it is not the friction of the swift current which makes it hot. The river flows over a bed of lava rock, which is still hot. Old Bridger told the truth of what he observed, but he did not understand the cause."

CHAPTER XVI

WINGED MILLIONS

TIME passed so quickly to the lads that they seemed to have forgotten that they had already been at Fort Totten much longer than they had expected, and that they had before them a long dangerous journey to the upper Yellowstone.

Joe also seemed to have forgotten about that dangerous western trip, for the first of October arrived and he said nothing about starting. However, he and Pete frequently had long talks in Joe's cabin, but when the boys came in they grew silent or changed the subject.

The lads frequently left their canoe some miles from the fort and rode to their hunting-grounds on horseback, picketing the animals till they had secured a load of game.

About the middle of October the weather

turned cold, and now all the ducks and geese of the country seemed to be going south by way of Lake Minnewaukan.

One evening as the lads entered the cabin, where Joe and Pete were having one of their long talks, the young hunters were much excited.

"Oh, Pete!" exclaimed Don, "you and Joe ought to go hunting with us. We saw two million ducks to-day. And we saw a hundred thousand geese, many big flocks of white ones."

"You are getting to be pretty good liars," remarked Pete with a sly wink at Joe.

"No, honestly, we did," Hank seconded his brother. "The bays and the whole lake are full of them. Big flocks of bluebills, mallards, canvasbacks and redheads, and thousands of others were coming and going all day long. Toward evening they were as thick as blackbirds. We counted 10,000 of them from one spot, and millions of other small birds are there."

"How could you count ten thousand?" asked Joe, appearing to be skeptical.

"We kind of divided them up into patches of a thousand," explained Hank, "and you couldn't imagine how many there were."

Don and Hank did not at all exaggerate the number of water-fowl they saw. Their number in those days almost passed belief. Even at the present time millions of them breed on the plains as far north as the Arctic Ocean and pass north and south every year like two great tidal waves of winged life.

Even in the fall of 1919 about 1,500,000 water-fowl were killed in the State of Minnesota alone, according to statistics gathered by the State Game and Fish Commissioner.

In the middle seventies white hunters had not materially decreased the number of game birds, and settlers had encroached but little upon their breeding-grounds.

The Indians never made any impression at all on the feathered game of the country. As long as buffalo and deer and other game animals could still be secured, the Indians could not afford to waste expensive ammunition on ducks and geese. They found the meat of game animals much more satisfying,

and some of the Plains tribes, like the Blackfeet, would not eat feathered game at all.

Before the Indians had firearms, the shooting of game-birds was largely a sport for the boys, the men hunting buffalo, deer, elk, moose, mountain sheep, and antelope. The making of arrows involved much work, and the hunter recovered his arrow whenever he could do so. Sometimes the hunters even cut the bullets out of the game, so as to use them again; because everything the Indians bought of the traders cost them a high price in furs and buffalo robes, and the nearest trading post was often hundreds of miles away from their hunting-grounds.

But let us return to our story.

"Have you hunted enough?" asked Joe, after the boys had eaten their supper. "We are going to start west in about two weeks, and Pete is going with us."

"Is Pete going with us? Are you, Pete?" both lads cried at once. And then they shouted and danced and threw their arms around the old soldier, till he was quite embarrassed.

"Let up on that, boys," he remonstrated. "The guard will think Joe has smuggled some fire-water into his shack.

"Yes, I am going with you. We are going to try and fool them with a winter campaign as Joe and Custer did south of the Arkansas. It is going to be pretty cold travelling. But if we strike good weather, and our horses don't give out, maybe we can do it."

"What do we do if we meet Indians?" asked Don.

"Wall, that depends on what the Injuns do and how many there are."

During the next two weeks, the boys found very little time for hunting.

Clothing had to be looked over and gotten together, packs and saddles needed repairing, and a small stock of provisions had to be selected. On guns and ammunition they did not skimp, but for food they expected to depend on game. In addition to a rifle and a Colt's revolver for each man, they took one shotgun and four short Sioux hunting bows with a supply of arrows.

"I don't think much of these Indian weapons," remarked Joe, "but Pete thinks we may have to do some pretty quiet hunting, so I guess we had better take them."

Their provisions consisted principally of tea, sugar, and coffee, a little flour, some bacon, a bag of hardtack, and a few smoked breasts of wild geese.

They decided to take an extra horse for each man, for both Joe and Pete feared that the trip would be hard on the horses, although the animals were now all in fine condition. They had all the horses shod by the blacksmith and they took some nails and two extra shoes for each horse.

"A lame horse," said Pete, "is not much better than a dead horse."

For shelter they bought an Indian tepee. Two light axes and a short-handled spade they also added to their equipment.

When everything had been collected, including blankets and clothing, it was found that each extra horse would have a small pack to carry.

"Eight horses," commented Pete, "is

really too many for slipping through, but I am afraid of some of the critters giving out. Winter travel is mighty hard on them, because the grass is poor, and they have little or no shelter. But here's luck; we have to do our best."

"Do the Indians ever shoe their horses?" asked Don.

"No, never," Pete answered, laughing. "They never feed them either, all they do is to drive them to water once or twice a day, and watch out that their enemies do not steal them."

"You ought to have seen all the ponies we captured on the Washita, eight hundred of them," remarked Joe.

"Eight hundred ponies!" cried Don. "What did you do with all of them?"

"Well," replied Joe sadly, "I never like to tell it, or even think of it, but we couldn't help ourselves. We could not take them along, and we could not return them to the Indians."

"Why couldn't you return them?" Hank asked, much interested, for Joe had never

spoken of this part of Custer's big fight on the Washita.

"We had been sent to punish the Indians for their outrages and murders on the Kansas frontier. They had killed about a hundred and fifty white people, burned houses and stolen cattle and horses. And the soldiers could never catch them in summer. They knew the country; and if a band was pressed too hard, they would scatter. But we did catch them by marching on their villages in winter. They had not thought the soldiers could do that."

"But what did you do with the ponies?" Hank pressed.

"Our Indian captives selected about forty of them for their own use, and the rest we had to shoot. I know Custer hated to order it, and the men hated to do it, but such is war. I shall be mighty, mighty glad when this country has seen its last Indian war. But you can't handle bad Indians by simply being nice to them any more than you can handle white criminals that way.

"The Cheyennes, Kiowas, Comanches,

and Arapahoes had begun to think that the government was powerless to control them and to punish their misdeeds. Well, Custer taught them a lesson, which they very much needed. It was a hard lesson, but it had to be done."

"Joe, why couldn't you take the ponies along?" asked Don with his face all flushed. "I think it was a shame to kill them."

"We wished very much to take them along," Joe continued, "but it was impossible. We had whipped and destroyed the Cheyenne village of Black Kettle, but only a few miles below his camp were three or four other large villages with thousands of warriors.

"I don't know what Custer thought, when in the afternoon hundreds of Indians appeared on the hills all around us. I was getting pretty well scared. Myself and many of the soldiers thought the worst of the fighting was still ahead of us.

"We had almost nothing to eat, our supply-wagons were thirty miles in the rear. Many of us had lost our overcoats; the In-

dians got them. We had them piled up in the rear, but the Indians were too much for the guard who had to run to save themselves.

" If we had taken the horses, the warriors from all the villages would have followed us trying to get the horses back. In following us they might have discovered our supply-wagons, before the regiment could again join the guard, and there is no telling what might have happened.

" You see, we could not possibly encumber our march with eight hundred ponies, all as wild as deer, and scared at the sight of a white man.

" Custer loves horses and dogs and I know he hated to give the order and we hated to carry it out, but you see it had to be done."

" It was too bad," remarked Don. " I wish Hank and I had some of those ponies for our trip."

" What do the Indians do when their horses get sore-footed, because they have no shoes on? "

" Sometimes they let them rest a few days, or take other horses, and sometimes they

make moccasins for them. I have seen white men doing that, too."

"Make moccasins for the horses?" asked Don, looking at Pete and thinking that Joe had begun to tell the same kind of stories that Pete was in the habit of telling.

"That is true," Pete agreed. "They make moccasins for the horses of buffalo skin. The horses like them, but the trouble is that they last only a day or two."

"Yes," added Joe, "Custer even made moccasins of leather for his dogs, so they would not be afraid of the prickly pear, that nasty wild cactus of the plains."

"You have not told us how you got away from the Indians that surrounded you in Black Kettle's village."

"That is too long a story to tell now; but we were mighty glad, when we reached our wagon-train next day. It is time to go to bed now.

"Pete, to-morrow we have to set up our tepee to be sure that everything is all right."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LONG RED SNAKE

THE tepee did need several patches and some new strings and loops before it was ready for service.

Hank and Don marvelled at the care with which Joe and Pete looked over every piece of the equipment. If they found the slightest flaw in the girth of a saddle or a worn buckle hole in a strap, the saddle or strap went to old Gill's shop.

The horses, after they had been shod, were taken out for a trial ride of several miles to make sure that they would not develop any lameness on the trip. The loads for the packhorses were tried on to make sure that packs and pack-saddles did not chafe the animals.

Extra care was given to the guns and revolvers. They were all taken apart and carefully cleaned and oiled.

Whatever hunting the boys had time to do, they did with bows and arrows, so as to be ready for any emergency.

Colonel Hunt offered to send an escort with the party for a day or two, but Pete declined the offer with thanks.

"An escort would do us no good, Colonel," he explained, "unless the men went with us clear to Bozeman. We shall just slip away as quietly as possible."

Pete's term of enlistment expired the last of October, and shortly before midnight the next day the four men rode quietly southward out of Fort Totten. They took this direction to avoid being observed by the Indians, most of whom had their camps in the timber south of the lake.

"These here Injuns," Pete remarked, "are friendly enough, I believe, but they have friends in the camps of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse and Gall; and it is surprising how fast news will travel from one Indian camp to another. An Indian runner will make from fifty to a hundred miles a day; and they also send warnings and news

by means of signal smokes from one camp to another.

" They have little to do now, and while the weather remains fair, they roam about, especially the young men, visiting, hunting, and horse-stealing, if they have a chance. Stealing horses is the next brave thing in the life of an Indian to killing and scalping an enemy. So I reckon it is just as well if our friends do not see us leave."

The weather had already turned quite cold, and the boys found that the heavy buffalo coats and the fur caps and mittens of the cavalry were just the right things to wear to make a night ride comfortable.

When the sun rose, the travellers found themselves on a prairie more lonely than the lads had ever seen. During their stay at Fort Totten they had failed to remember that Lake Minnewaukan was a big oasis of woods and water on the vast plain.

They stopped for breakfast after the red sun had risen above the plain as if it came out of a sea of dead grass, strewn with the wreckage of thousands and thousands of

bleached buffalo skeletons; for the hired skin-hunters had gotten in their deadly work all around the lake.

How both men and boys missed the tantalizing tune of reveille, the cheerful notes of mess call and the friendly faces and merry voices of the soldiers!

> "Soupy, soupy, soupy, not a single bean,
> Coffee, coffee, coffee, not a bit of cream;
> Porky, porky, porky, not a streak of lean,"

Joe sang out, and added: "Cheer up, friends, cheer up and eat! Travelling in a snowstorm will be much worse!"

In half an hour they were again in the saddle, but they now changed their direction from south to southwest, so as to strike the Missouri some twenty miles above the mouth of the Little Missouri. Joe had procured a map of Dakota and Montana, and this map and a compass were their only guides.

Hour after hour they travelled over the same country, where nothing but white buffalo bones and an occasional coyote broke the monotony of the brown ridges and swales of the dead prairie. The summer birds as

well as the migrating flocks of ducks and geese were gone. Gophers and badgers were asleep in their holes, and all big game had vanished, as if there had never been a hoof on the plains.

About noon they came to a small stream with a few patches of stunted timber along its banks.

"This is First Camp," said Joe. "Boys, chop a hole in the ice, and then bring some wood and water, and start a fire, while Pete and I set up the tepee and picket the horses."

The warm blaze, several cups of hot sweet tea, and a good meal of smoked goose-breast and hardtack revived their spirits.

After dinner the boys could not keep their eyes open any longer, and Joe told them they had better roll up in their blankets and go to sleep.

"Pete and I," he added, "will see to it that Sitting Bull or the gray wolves do not carry you off. To-morrow you watch while Pete and I take a nap."

Hank thought it was unnecessary precau-

tion for anybody to stay awake in such a dead country, but Pete and Joe said that old soldiers were used to that sort of thing, and you never could tell what might happen, and it was worse for everybody to go to sleep in the daytime than at night.

" If we had taken a dog along," said Don, " we could all go to sleep now."

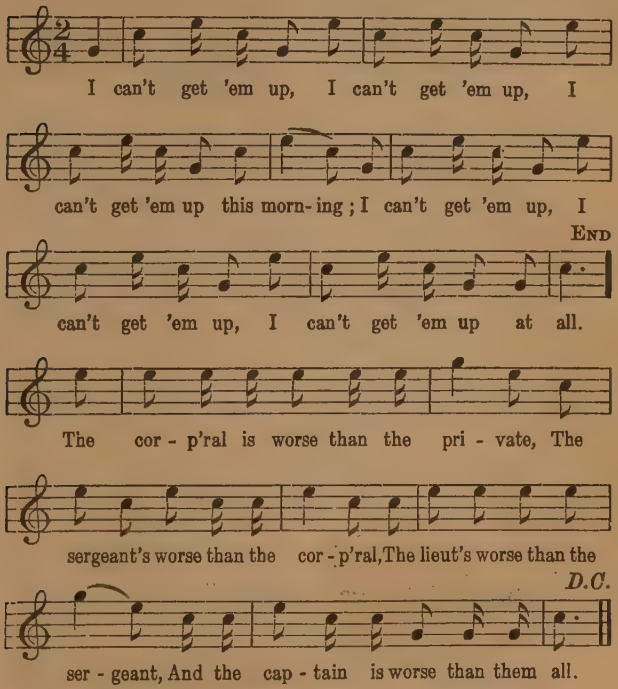
" Yes, and have your dog betray us to an Indian war party some day," Joe replied. " Don't you remember that it was the barking of a dog that first betrayed the exact location of Black Kettle's camp to Custer and his scouts? "

" That is true, lads," Pete added. " I like dogs, but not on a trip like this. The Indians always have a lot of dogs in their camps, but a war party never takes any dogs along. The trouble is a dog doesn't know when to bark and when to keep still.

" We are a kind of white man's war party now, and a dog would be a dangerous companion."

Pete had scarcely finished talking when the boys were sound asleep.

About three hours the men let them sleep. Then Joe began to imitate the army reveille:


I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up, I
can't get 'em up this morn- ing ; I can't get 'em up, I
End
can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up at all.
The cor - p'ral is worse than the pri - vate, The
sergeant's worse than the cor - p'ral, The lieut's worse than the
D.C.
ser - geant, And the cap - tain is worse than them all.

The words of the old call were never more true, for Pete had to help his friend before the lads became aroused.

Then Hank sat up and began to rub his eyes, and seeing Don still fast asleep, he called:

"Get up, Don! Indians! Sitting Bull!"

Now Don sprang up. "Where are they? Where's my gun?" he called.

But Joe and Pete did not join Hank's laugh.

"Never do that again!" Joe spoke sharply. "No sensible man ever gives a false alarm in the Indian country. And both of you boys want to keep your guns always in the same place. You may want them in a hurry some day."

A strong breeze was now blowing from the south, and Pete thought he saw dust or smoke in that direction. On riding to the top of a ridge, they soon made out that a cloud of smoke was driven before the wind. After they had watched the cloud a while, they could plainly smell fire.

"The prairie is on fire!" called Joe. "Come, men, we must back-fire around our camp, or all our stuff will burn up! Every man run and bring a piece of wet canvas or gunny sack."

Hank and Don did not understand just what Joe meant to do, but back-firing was

nothing new to Pete. In a few minutes he and Joe had started a prairie fire about a quarter of a mile south of camp; and it was now every man's work to see that this fire did not run away, but burn a strip about a rod wide in front of the camp.

They had not prepared for this unexpected danger any too soon, for when the fire-break was ready, a long red snake came fast creeping over the nearest ridge, travelling before the wind with the speed of a running horse. When it crossed a swale, where the dead grass was tall and thick, it raged forward with a fierce crackling noise, which made the horses jump and pull on the picket-ropes.

Pete quieted the frightened animals, but Joe and the boys ran and beat out the flames, which again and again jumped the fire-break.

When the danger had passed in front of the camp, they kept the fire as far as possible from the sides of the camp; so a good-sized space was left unburnt for the horses to graze.

By the time the fire had passed the camp, it was almost dark; and the glaring red flames, miles long, left the prairie a gloomy and forbidding world. Farther and farther the endless red snake travelled northward, until it disappeared behind a rise and left only a weird, lurid glow on the sky.

"I guess we may as well make supper," suggested Joe, when nothing was left of the fire but a few burning sticks near the creek.

"Where did the fire come from?" the boys wished to know, when the company were eating their supper, seated around a cheerful small fire inside of the tent.

"That is impossible to tell," said Joe. "A prairie fire may run a hundred miles before a river or a lake stops it, or before rain or snow put it out."

"But how does a prairie fire get started?" asked Don.

"In many ways. Sometimes the Indians start it to cause a better growth of grass for their ponies or for the buffalo herds. At other times they start fires to drive their

enemies out of the country or to protect themselves from pursuit by an enemy.

"A camp-fire may spread, lightning may start a prairie fire, or it may start from a burning coal-bed."

"Burning coal-beds?" questioned Hank. "Where are they?"

"There are many beds of very soft coal, or lignite, on the Missouri, on the Yellowstone and in the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri," Pete told. "I have often seen the coal-beds, but I have never seen one on fire; but the Indians and old plainsmen say that a coal-bed sometimes burns for many years."

"What do you say to all of us rolling in?" suggested Joe, after he had made sure that all the horses were securely picketed. "We can all go safely to sleep; for no Indians will travel over this burnt prairie."

CHAPTER XVIII

GUACALOTE

If both men and boys had not enjoyed a long refreshing sleep, the sight which met their eyes next morning would have been depressing beyond words.

Their camp was located on a point of brown prairie, dotted by a few scrubby trees and bushes; the rest of the world, as far as the eye could reach, was a burnt and blackened earth with a dead gray sky above it.

A hearty warm breakfast dispelled a little of the gloom, but when beyond the first ridge, where the lads had expected to see the end of the burnt ground, the dead black plain was not even relieved by a patch of brown grass and a few bushes, their spirits fell, and they almost wished they had not come. The only objects set off from the black prairie were the ashy hills of gophers and badgers and the scattered bones and skulls of buffaloes.

But Joe and Pete appeared neither surprised nor sad. They acted and talked as if all this devastation was most common and expected.

When Joe noticed the depressed state of mind of the lads, he tried to cheer them up.

"This is not bad travelling, boys," he told them. "Pete and I think this is almost like summer travel. On the Washita campaign we travelled and slept in a foot of snow."

But the lads found no more cheer in Joe's remarks than in the forbidding aspect ahead of them, where the wind was stirring up clouds of black dust and ashes.

"What are we going to live on if we find no game?" asked Don, seriously worried, and thinking of the abundance of game they had seen in spring, between Bismarck and the Souris River.

"Wall," old Pete drawled with a glance at Joe, "we have four extra horses, if no game shows up."

"I shall eat none of my horses," asserted Don. "I would rather starve than kill one of them."

Pete and Joe were not worried about food for the men, but they did feel uneasy about the horses. The winter forage was poor enough at its best. If the horses had to travel without any food at all for a day or two they would soon play out. It was for these reasons that the two men anxiously scanned the prairie through their glasses; but there seemed to be no end to the burnt plain.

"Pete, I believe the best thing we can do," declared Joe, "is to hold a westerly course and keep going till we strike grass."

Pete agreed to this plan and they marched steadily in a westerly course; but when after another hour, no sign of unburnt prairie was visible, both of the boys felt much discouraged.

They suggested that some other direction might take them out of the burnt area in less time.

Pete and Joe, who saw that the lads were really alarmed at the prospect of men and horses starving on the black desert, tried to quiet their fears.

"We can't go either north or east," they explained, "because that would lead us farther away from our destination. We should not go south, because the fire came from that direction, so the only sensible thing to do is to travel west till we reach the western limit of the burnt area."

Early in the afternoon the horses, who had all begun to lag, increased their speed.

"I think they are smelling grass," remarked Pete, "or game, maybe!"

The lads asked no questions about this remark, although Pete seemed to expect it, for Hank as well as Don suspected that Cactus Pete was attempting to bait them with one of his impossible stories.

The boys looked at Joe, but he was plodding along, with his head bent and his face black from the fine dust that filled the air. He seemed lost in thought, and apparently had not heard Pete's remark.

However, when they had ascended the next ridge, they could not quite trust their own eyes.

"Look, Joe," Don called as he stopped his

horse and pointed west; " is that a real country or is it one of those mirages that you and Pete told us about? "

" That is a real country," Joe assured them. " If we don't get into any worse trouble than that little prairie fire, we shall have an easy trip.

" What was that text Phillips Brooks preached on the last Sunday we attended Trinity Church in Boston? "

" I don't remember it all," Hank confessed, " but one phrase of it was: ' O ye of little faith! ' "

" That was the text," said Joe with a kindly smile. "And do you remember the rector saying that men of little faith were always men of little courage, and that Washington and Hamilton and Paul Jones and Abraham Lincoln had been men of strong faith and great courage? "

" Yes," Don admitted, " I remember the whole sermon now, but I guess Hank and I did not think that a sermon like that meant us riding over this prairie."

" Wall, boys, you see now what it means,"

added Pete, contentedly filling his black pipe. "It means go ahead, fight it out, no matter what happens. That's a good soldier's motto, I reckon."

In half an hour the travellers reached the shore of a small lake, one of many in the same region. All gloom had now suddenly vanished; and as soon as a camp site had been selected, Pete slipped away with his rifle, calling to the boys, "Help Joe take care of the horses."

In a few minutes they heard a shot, and very soon Pete came back carrying a fat young deer.

"Did you know that deer was there?" asked the boys.

"No," answered Pete, "but I thought that wooded ravine looked like a good hiding-place for game, and you see I was right. We shall not have to eat our horses right away. Hurry up, boys, build a fire; we shall have broiled liver and venison for supper. I'm powerful hungry."

Pete was not the only one that was hungry. Neither Joe nor the boys lost a min-

ute, when Pete started to imitate the mess call of Fort Totten.

And the horses, too, acted as if they were starved. No sooner had they drunk their fill out of the holes, which Joe had cut through the ice, than they began rustling for their supper among the bushes on the lake shore, where the grass still showed a little green in patches.

"Let them rustle in their own way for a while," said Joe; "but for the night we must picket them."

"Go a little easy on the hardtack," Pete admonished the lads, "but you need not skimp on the venison. If you boys ever wished to live like Indians, the Great Spirit has heard your prayer; for I reckon we shall soon find game enough to live as high as the warriors in Sitting Bull's camp. It will soon be all meat and no hardtack."

After supper Pete and Joe lit their pipes and began swapping yarns at the camp-fire and to speculate on the whereabouts of the Indian camps.

"I hope they are all on the Powder River

and the Big Horn and the Rosebud," was Joe's wish, " and I hope that they have made a good fall hunt and that they find plenty of game south of the Yellowstone."

" Your wish is mine," Pete broke his silence, " but I have my doubts. The country of the Big Horn, the Rosebud, and the Powder is good game country, but the broken country of the Little Missouri also offers fine shelter and good grass for game and ponies. The hostile Sioux are pretty sure to break up into several camps for the winter, because a camp of Indians needs an immense amount of game and much forage for the pony herds. And no matter how much meat they dried and smoked on their fall hunt, they seldom have enough without doing some hunting during winter. It would not surprise me if some of them were camping on the Little Missouri, somewhere south of the line surveyed for the Northern Pacific Railroad, where it is to run through the Bad Lands. We shall have to keep our eyes open for signs of them as soon as we have crossed the Missouri."

"How can we cross the Missouri without a boat or a ferry?" asked Don anxiously.

"We shall see about that when we get there," replied Pete. "We soldiers never worry about anything till we get to it."

As the wind was not strong, Joe and Pete decided that it was not necessary to set up the tent. Before it grew dark each man spread out his blankets and buffalo robe, then they picketed the horses, and when the coyotes began their night song, the tired travellers wrapped themselves in their warm soft robes and were soon fast asleep.

The next day Joe killed a fat young elk, and game was now abundant wherever there was some shelter of broken ground or timber. They also began to see buffaloes, but did not hunt them, because a buffalo would have furnished more meat than the four men could have used.

"On the Arkansas we almost lived on wild turkeys, but I have never heard of them in this country," Joe remarked. "These prairie-hens are too small to waste our ammunition on."

When, at the close of these remarks, Joe smiled as if thinking of something pleasant, the boys demanded to know what he was smiling at and Joe told them that he was thinking about an old Indian chief and a turkey.

" The Indians," Joe resumed, " have their peculiar likes and dislikes about game and food.

" On the Arkansas we almost lived on wild turkey. Occasionally the hunters brought in a big gobbler, who had roosted on the trees so many seasons that he remained tough, no matter how long we cooked him. We had been boiling one of those old birds for hours on Pawnee Creek one day, when an old chief came to our camp with a number of young hunters.

"As usual, the Indians were hungry and begged for some ' chuck.' That is the word which to all Indian tribes means food.

" We were rather short on the usual army rations, but our captain pointed to the boiling kettle, signing that the Indians might have it.

" The old chief examined it carefully and told his young men that it was ' guacalote,' meaning turkey. To eat it would make them cowards, and they would run away from their enemies like the ' guacalotes ' run away from the hunters. He himself was an old man, and did not expect to do any more brave deeds, so he might risk it.

"After this little talk the old chief began eating, and in about an hour the kettle was empty, and of the old ' guacalote ' nothing was left but the bones."

" Joe, do you mean to say that one Indian ate the whole turkey? " asked Hank.

" He not only ate the whole turkey, but he drank every spoonful of the soup," vowed Joe; " and you needn't think that this is one of Pete's stories, one of the Devil's Heart kind.

" It is true, every word of it. Indians who eat little else but meat can stow away an incredible amount of food."

On the fourth evening the travellers made camp in a fine grove of cottonwoods on the bank of the Missouri. The problem of

crossing the river next morning, as Pete had hinted, was very simple. The weather had been cold enough so the river was frozen over solid in places where the current was fairly slow.

From this camp they followed the river; two men carefully scouting ahead on the lookout for Indians. Game, fuel, and water were plentiful, and as there was no snow on the ground, travelling through the keen air of late autumn was a delight. The boys had become hardened, and their appetites demanded from four to six pounds of fat meat a day, for they ate practically nothing else, saving their little flour and hardtack for a possible emergency.

For cooking their meals, they gathered dry wood, so as to make as little smoke as possible, and when they had finished cooking the fire was put out. Although there was no dearth of wood and the boys wanted very much to build a big camp-fire after dark, Joe and Pete would not allow it.

"A good red camp-fire would be fine these cold nights," Pete and Joe granted, "but

we don't want to build any signal fires for Sitting Bull's scouts and hunters."

"What would they do if they found us?" asked Don. "We could tell them that we were just on our way to Bozeman."

"Wall, I know what they would want to do," said Pete, "and I shouldn't invite them to a talk."

"What would they want to do?" questioned Hank.

"Wall," Pete answered dryly, "I reckon society is pretty dull in Sitting Bull's camp just now, and four nice cottonwood poles with a fresh scalp at the end of each would get up a little real excitement—a pleasant little diversion, I reckon you say in Boston."

CHAPTER XIX

THE BLIZZARD

On the morning of the eighth day the weather was remarkably warm and quiet.

"We are going to have an Indian summer," the boys declared, as they put their heavy coats on the packhorses.

But Pete and Joe were not so elated about the fine weather.

"I am much suspicious about an Indian summer in this country in the middle of November," asserted Pete. "I remember too well how these warm days used to end at Fort Totten.

"Joe, those tall buttes off yonder must be on the Little Missouri. Take your glass and scout a bit for signs of our red friends. It is about time we meet some of them; not that I am exactly pining for their company. I think our appearance might shock them.

You and I, Joe, are beginning to look a trifle scrubby around the chin."

Joe reported that he could discover no smoke or dust or any sign of either Indians or white men. Pete and the boys took the glass in turn, but there was no sign of human beings. Small herds of buffaloes, a bunch of elk and a herd of antelope they could make out, but all the animals were quietly feeding or lying down, and showed no sign of having been disturbed by hunters. Some herds were slowly travelling west.

"I guess they are going to water," suggested Joe.

"Maybe they are looking for a good camp," Pete put in. "All right, men. The trail is clear. I say we march along to get off the open prairie. This fine weather ought to be extra fine among the buttes of the Bad Lands."

Within an hour, a dark rim began to appear on the western horizon. The boys paid no special attention to it, but Pete and Joe exchanged anxious remarks and glances, and urged the horses to a faster walk.

"What do you make of it?" asked Pete, after Joe had been scanning the rapidly growing cloud through his glass.

"A dust-storm, I think," answered Joe doubtfully.

"Anyhow," asserted Pete, "there's wind in that black cloud. See how quick it rises! Joe, I am afraid it is worse than a dust-storm. It looks like a snowstorm to me. Let us go straight for that little grove of cottonwoods below the nearest butte, and the sooner we get there the better."

For half an hour they travelled in silence, watching the black cloud spreading and rising rapidly over the whole western sky. Now, after it had obscured the sun, its black color seemed less pronounced, but it spread a foreboding murky gray over the plain and over the ragged broken Bad Lands ahead of the travellers.

"Get into your fur coats, boys," called Pete, "and put on your caps and fur mittens! A storm is coming up fast. Look, the game is all going for shelter to the broken country. Let us lose no time in

reaching shelter, but we must not get our horses heated."

The storm was indeed coming up fast. A cloud of black dust, picked up over a distant burnt area and from the bare slopes and cliffs of the Bad Lands, came whirling over the buttes and broken country with a cold blast, and was immediately followed by a thin flurry of snow, consisting of fine crystals of ice.

The air seemed quickly to be filling with this fine snow, the wind was rapidly increasing in violence, and the travellers found it difficult to breathe and keep their eyes open in the face of the storm and the stinging ice dust.

The horses needed no urging, but had to be held back from breaking into a run for the shelter ahead.

When the four horsemen reached the grove of cottonwoods and willows under the lee of a butte, the dust-storm had changed into a snowstorm.

"Strap the blankets on the horses," ordered Joe, "and gather all the wood you

can find, while Pete and I arrange the packs and set up the tepee. Turn the horses loose; we must not picket them in the storm."

"But, Joe," urged Hank, "there is no water in this river; only a few pools of ice."

"Never mind, boys," Pete pressed them. "Take one of the axes and get wood. Gather all the dry stuff you can find, but cut some green poles, too. Hurry up, boys! We shall need a lot of it, and it will soon be dark."

The storm was growing in violence every minute and the air was filling with whirling snow.

"Be careful, boys," called Joe as he and Pete struggled with the flapping tepee, "that you don't get lost!"

In a short time the tepee was up, and the boys had gathered a goodly pile of wood.

"Tie the picket-ropes together," called Pete, "and run the rope out to your cutting place. Joe and I will pile the goods around the tent, so the wind cannot get under the sides. Get some more wood! You have only half enough."

When the tent was ready Joe and Pete ran along the rope trying to keep their eyes open in the blinding whirls of fine sharp snow.

"Come, boys," Joe called. "Everybody take an armful of wood and run back along the rope. Bring the ax, Hank. Come, boys! We can't work any longer.

"Pete, pull the rope in, and all get into the tent. We reached shelter none too soon. Listen! How the storm begins to howl!"

Although the sun was still an hour high, it was dark inside the tent; while outside, the whole world seemed a gray whirling mass of wind and fine stinging snow that seemed to come from all directions and sifted into every hole and crevice.

Joe started a fire with dry sticks and began to make supper, while Pete lit his old pipe and seated himself comfortably on his blankets.

Soon the odor of coffee, frying bacon, and venison filled the tent.

"Now, friends, fall to," said Joe as he set out the tin plates and cups. "Melting snow

and ice is a pretty slow way of making coffee, but we have plenty of time now. Eat slow, boys; we shall be gentlemen of leisure for a while."

Fine snow crystals kept whirling through the smoke-hole. For a few seconds they glistened in the light of the fire, then they vanished; but near the edges of the tent, they soon covered everything with a fine white dust. Outside, the storm howled around the cliffs; it roared through the trees, and rattled the bare frozen branches against one another.

When supper was over and the fire had burnt low, Joe closed the smoke-flap and lit a candle.

"We won't have to travel to-morrow, and, I reckon, Sitting Bull and his braves are not hunting for scalps to-night. It sounds like a regular blizzard outside. I hope our horses have found a safe, sheltered spot. I wish we could take the poor beasts inside with us."

"They are all right," asserted Pete. "You picked out a regular bunch of Indian ponies.

I wonder where old Stearn at Bismarck got them. You couldn't pull them under a roof. I know, because I tried it at Fort Totten."

"Pete, you are a heathen Indian," Joe bantered his friend. "Tell us a yarn. But none of that deep lake at Devil's Heart. If you don't stick to the truth, you sleep outside to-night."

CHAPTER XX

THE WAGON-BOX FIGHT

As is the case with most frontiersmen and Indians, the stories of Cactus Pete only flowed when Pete was in the mood.

This evening, with the storm raging and moaning and a light shimmer of fine snow crystals drifting in at the peak of the tepee and secretly entering through a few small rents in the old buffalo skins, Pete was in a reminiscent mood.

He was a big boy again, enjoying the wild commotion of nature, although his remarks were neither elegant nor delicate.

"Hear her howl, lads," he would say. "Listen to her roaring like a mad buffalo bull. Them sailor lads brag about storms, and I reckon they run into some good ones. But listen to this, boys! It's real music, like the bass and horns in the big organ of the bishop's church in St. Louis.

"There's some men, Joe, who love California or Florida. Not I. Give me a country where I can hear the song of the storm! It is God's own organ playing among the buttes and the cottonwoods!"

"Yes, it is grand music," agreed Joe, "when you sit around a fire or a candle with a warm supper inside of you. But what about our poor beasts outside, with no water and no food?"

"They will eat snow for a drink," argued Pete. "Eating snow does not go well with humans, but Indian ponies and buffaloes don't mind it. They quit going to water when there is snow on the plains."

"But they must starve or freeze to death," remarked Don. "It is getting cold in the tepee. I am going to put on my big coat."

"They always have a big coat on in winter," Pete replied, "and they don't starve so very soon, I reckon. These ponies have weathered more than one blizzard; but I am going to look for them at daylight."

For a while the four campers sat in silence

around the candle, where light was weirdly reflected from the red faces of the boys and from the strong, bearded visages of the men.

"I wonder," Pete began after some time, "where the hostile Sioux and Cheyennes made their winter camps.

"I guess they are south of the Yellowstone in the big game country on Powder River, on the Rosebud or on the Big Horn."

"Wall, now," objected Pete, "they can't all camp in one region. There are too many of them. It would not surprise me, if some of them had pitched their tepees north of the Yellowstone on the Little Missouri south of here. That is a good game country. Perhaps old Sitting Bull is not so very far from here, and some of his young hunters may look us up, after the weather turns mild again."

"Sitting Bull! What a funny name!" said Hank. "Why did they give him that name?"

"I can tell you that," answered Pete. "When Sitting Bull was a boy, his tribe had made a great buffalo hunt, and the In-

dian boys were trying to catch some of the calves. This boy caught a big strong calf by the ears. In its efforts to get away, the young bull backed into a buffalo wallow and sat down on his haunches. 'He made the bull sit down!' exclaimed the hunters, and ever since, the boy has been called Sitting Bull. He is a great medicine man and has much influence amongst the Indians. If he had ever done great deeds in war, they would have given him another name."

Joe lifted the door-flap a little and peeped out. "Whoo, what a terrible blizzard!" he exclaimed. "It is pitch dark, and we are already snowed in. Get your beds ready, boys, and let us all roll in. It is an awful night outside!"

The boys were soon sound asleep, but Joe cut some dry shavings with his hunting-knife and laid the wood ready on the fire-place, while Pete looked on in silence, listening to the storm, which was still increasing in violence, rushing over the buttes and through the trees in a dull wild roar.

"It is a great storm," remarked Pete, as

he pulled a blanket gently over the heads of the boys. "The night will grow cold, and we had better all sleep Indian fashion."

When the candle was blown out, the darkness in the tepee was absolute.

"I reckon," remarked Pete, "it is about as dark now in our tepee as it is in a hole in the ground. It is a merciful thing that badgers and gophers and prairie-dogs can den up during the winter."

"I wish our ponies could den up, too," remarked Joe, as he turned over drowsily. "I am glad we brought blankets for them," and very soon the men were as sound asleep as the boys.

About the time of reveille Pete woke up. He struck a match and made sure that the boys were warm and comfortable.

"She is still a-roaring," he said to Joe, who opened his eyes and shook a layer of powdered snow off his blankets. "I reckon we might as well turn over for a few hours more. There will be no travelling for a day or two. We are denned up like the badgers and gophers."

There is a limit, however, to the time which men and even boys can sleep; and about two hours after the usual time for reveille, Don woke up and began to punch Hank.

"Wake up, Hank!" he called. "It must be daylight outside. Wake up, we are all snowed in." And he began to wash Hank's face with a handful of snow, which brought the elder brother out of his blankets so quick that Don, in turn, had his face rubbed over a snow-covered buffalo robe before he was able to defend himself. In a moment the two lads scuffled all over the tepee. Now one was on top, now the other. They tumbled over Joe's neat woodpile and rattled the tin pans all over the tepee.

"Here, you young Injuns!" cried Pete. "No fighting in the house!" And with these words he chucked one after the other into a deep, soft snow-bank outside, where they landed with a scream of surprise.

"Let us in, let us in," begged Don; "we'll be good!"

"All right," remarked Pete. "A snow

bath is much better than a shower bath. You both needed a good wash. Now go back to bed; it is too early to get up."

"It isn't, either," claimed Don. "I'm not a bit sleepy, but I am hungry."

"Wall, Joe," Pete relented, "we had better roll out and give these young wolves something to eat."

The storm outside still rushed over the plain with unbroken fury. "Listen, Hank," said Don, "it roars just like Niagara Falls, when you are a little way off.

"Joe, how do you think our horses are? Hank and I are going to put on our boots and big coats after breakfast and look for them."

"All right," Pete told them; "I want you to take a biscuit to my pony."

Joe insisted that the boys take hold of the rope, when they left the tepee half an hour later.

"Don, don't you lose my biscuit," Pete called after them as they crept out of the tepee. "And don't you let go of the rope!

"Kids is kids," he chuckled to Joe. "They won't go far."

Now the voices of the lads were lost, and Pete at once became anxious. "Darn it, Joe," he said, "I fear these fool kids won't hang on to the rope after all.

"Hey! You blooming young idiots!" he shouted into the storm as he gave the rope a smart pull. "Get back here! Haven't you got sense enough to go in in a blizzard? Do you expect us to dig you out? Come back here, you dummies!"

And to his satisfaction the lads came tumbling and crawling back along the rope, looking like a pair of Eskimos that had just crawled out of a snowbank.

Both of them had their eyes and ears closed with frozen snow, and the men had a hearty laugh at their snorting and blowing, as they cleared their faces of snow.

"Whow!" cried Hank, when he caught his breath. "You can't see five yards ahead, and the fine stuff just closes your eyes and the terrible wind chokes the breath out of you! I bet our horses are all dead."

"Wall, if they are," admitted Pete, "we can't help it. I reckon you are convinced now that we cannot do anything for them while it blows like this.

"Joe, keep the fire going, and I'll tell you about the big fight in the wagon-box. We won't have a thing to do all day."

"How could you fight Indians in a wagon-box?" asked Don, a little incredulous.

"Wall, it wasn't a fight in just one wagon-box," Pete explained. "We fought them in a wagon-box corral, but we always spoke of it as the Wagon-Box Fight.

"You see, it was at Fort Phil Kearney, in Wyoming, in the summer of 1867. It was the worst place for Indian fights there ever was on earth.

"We built the fort in the summer of 1866 on the Little Piney, which is one of the head creeks of Powder River.

"Wall, lads, nobody could tell of all the fights we had with the Indians, unless he had made a book and written in it every day.

"We had to cut all our logs and firewood

seven miles from the fort, but we could not cut or haul a log without a heavy guard. There was lots of game, but General Carrington had to forbid all hunting, for it was almost certain death for one or two men to leave the fort.

"How many Indians we killed, I don't know, they always carry off their dead, but through the summer and fall the Indians killed more than a hundred white soldiers and citizens."

"What Indians were they?" asked Don.

"They were nearly all Sioux under Chief Red Cloud, but there were some Cheyennes with them.

"It was a few days before Christmas, on the 21st, if I remember right, that the Indians again attacked the wood-train, a train of teams and wagons, I mean. They had the train and the guard surrounded and Captain Fetterman was sent out with eighty men to relieve the wood-train. General Carrington, who understood the situation and knew that the country was full of Indians, thousands of them, ordered Fetterman not

to pursue the Indians. Fetterman had a great contempt for the Sioux as fighters. He and other young officers and many of the soldiers thought they knew a lot more than the commanding general. Fetterman had bragged that, with eighty men, he could ride through the whole Sioux nation."

"Did he relieve the wood-train?" questioned Hank.

"Yes, he did. That is, the Indians left the wood-train as soon as their scouts reported that more soldiers were coming.

"In some way they led Fetterman on beyond a ridge, which he had been ordered not to cross. He disobeyed his orders, and he and every man in his command lost their lives.

"It was a terrible loss, for it wiped out about one-fourth of the whole garrison."

"But this was not the Wagon-Box Fight?" asked Don.

"No, it was not. That came next summer, in 1867, but I had to tell you first something about our life at Fort Phil Kearney on the Little Piney, in Wyoming.

"We had many fights all through the winter, but we fought them from the wagon-boxes on August second, '67.

"It was on Piney Island, and my company, under Major James Powell, had been sent to protect the contractors who were cutting wood on the island, and I never expect to see a hotter fight.

"I don't know why the place was called an island, it was just a big piece of pine timber with some open spots. Piney Creek ran on one side of it, and I believe there was a dry run on the other side; maybe that is the reason General Carrington called the place Piney Island. In one of the open spots we had made a corral of wagon-boxes, and in this corral we kept the forage for the horses and some supplies for the men."

"But, Pete, why did you fight from wagon-boxes?" asked Don.

"Just wait a bit, son, and you will know. If it hadn't been for the wagon-boxes, I wouldn't be Cactus Pete any more, and I wouldn't be denned up here telling you about it. We were just thirty-two white

men in that fight, thirty-two, remember, but there was a whole woods full of Indians, 3,000 of them, maybe more."

The boys looked dubiously at Joe. "That's right, lads," Joe volunteered. "This is a true story and the numbers are right. Of course, nobody counted the Indians, but Red Cloud, who was then the most famous war chief, had all his braves there, and was determined to destroy Fort Phil Kearney."

"Wall, the row started in earnest on August second, pretty early in the morning," continued Pete, who was now warming up to his story.

"The hills and the woods were just running over with Indians. They fell upon the wood-train and the woodcutters, but when we, that is twenty-six of us under Captain Powell and Lieutenant Jenness, went after them, they let the train and the woodcutters get away and all made for us. Of course, we couldn't stop them and we retreated into a wagon-box corral on an open spot in the woods. Four civilians joined us here; all

four were frontiersmen and good shots. We were plumb glad to see them."

"Did they give you time to make the corral?" asked Don.

"No, lads, we had made it before. Fourteen wagon-boxes and two wagons we had arranged like this," and Pete drew a diagram on the ground.

"We kept all kinds of supplies in this corral, bales of clothing, sacks of corn, and other things. With big augers we had drilled loopholes in the wagon-boxes, and we piled sacks of corn and goods against the inside of the boxes and between them; anything that would turn a bullet we used in our little fort.

"We had plenty of breech-loading rifles, the Allen model of the old Springfields, and

plenty of Colt's revolvers and lots of ammunition. Some men, who were poor shots, were detailed to do nothing but load the guns.

"It was lucky that the Reds gave us a little time to get ready, while they stopped to plunder and burn the woodcutters' camp. But now they were surely coming for us.

"'Pete, thar's a thousand of them!' my partner in the box whispered. 'Look, they are going to ride plumb over us!'

"Wall, on they came with a rush, all painted up and in their war bonnets, 600 of them I should say. When the solid mass was within fifty yards of us, Captain Powell called, 'Fire!'

"Down they came, ponies and men; we couldn't miss them. But they didn't stop. They divided and circled around us, and you may believe we kept the guns blazing at them, and they did not spare us either. But we got them rattled; for each of us had two breech-loaders and one old trapper used eight guns.

"I reckon they had figured we would give

them one volley and then they would ride over us and finish us quick. I never heard of Indians standing so much punishment, but our steady blaze was too much for them. They broke and fled out of range, what there was left of them. In front of the corral, where they had made the first charge, there was a terrible sight; dead and wounded horses and men lying as thick as if they had been mowed down.

" But they did not intend to give up. Red Cloud now sent out some 700 skirmishers on foot, and they kept up a steady fire of guns and arrows. The arrows did not worry us much; we caught them in blankets spread over the wagon-boxes.

" By and by they must have thought that most of us were dead, for we only fired when we could see a head. Now the whole mob, I should say a thousand of them, started to charge us on foot. On they came, nearer and nearer in spite of our bullets dropping them right and left. So close they came, that some of the soldiers lost their nerve and threw augers and other tools at them. It

was a terrible moment. The foremost Injuns were within a few feet of the corral. If they once got inside for a hand-to-hand fight our little band could last only a few minutes. Fortunately most of our men kept up a deadly fire with rifles and pistols, which just in the nick of time proved more than they could stand. They broke and ran for the hills, from which Red Cloud and the old chiefs and the women and children had been watching the fight.

"They made four charges after this one, but in none of these did they come dangerously near the corral.

"In the middle of the afternoon Red Cloud sent out his skirmishers again, and we thought the end had come. But they had had enough, and only tried to carry off their dead and wounded, and we could now plainly hear the death songs of the old men and women.

"About three in the afternoon a shell burst in the midst of the Indian skirmishers, and we saw soldiers in blue charging the Indians. And you ought to have heard the

hurrahs from the soldiers and from our men in the wagon-boxes.

" The guard and the woodcutters had brought the news of our plight to the fort and Major Smith with a hundred men and a howitzer had been sent to our relief.

" The Sioux could have destroyed us all, but they had lost heart. We retreated to the fort without another attack, and left the corral to the Indians.

" And that is the story of our fight in the Wagon-Box and how we got out alive."

" Didn't you lose any men at all? " asked Hank.

" Yes, we did. Lieutenant Jenness and a soldier were killed and two men were wounded. It has always been a mystery to me that not more of us were killed, but Indians under excitement are poor shots and we had fixed up a mighty good fort.

" Of course, if they had caught us in the open, or had attacked us in the open, while we were marching back to the fort, not a man would have been left to tell the story.

" Believe me, boys, there never was such a

fort for fights and more fights as Fort Phil Kearney on the Little Piney in Wyoming.

"It is a shame that the government abandoned it. I heard that the Indians burnt it as soon as the soldiers had left.

"Lord, how that storm roars!"

CHAPTER XXI

STRANGE HORSE-FEED

When Pete closed his story, the lads had, at once, many questions to ask.

"How many men did the Indians lose?" they wanted to know.

"Wall, lads," Pete answered, "nobody can tell exactly, but we must have killed and wounded a thousand of them. As I told you, each of us had two rifles and, at least, one six-shooter; and an old trapper who was with us used eight guns.

"General Sheridan had a talk with this old man some time after the battle. 'How many Indians did you kill?' asked the General.

"'Wall, General, I can't say for sartin. But give me a dead rest, and I can hit a dollar at fifty yards every time, and I fired with a dead rest about fifty times.'

"'Great Scott! How many guns did you use?'

"'Wall, General, for about three hours I kept eight of 'em pretty well het up.'

"It is a fact that many of the guns became so heated that the men could not touch them for a while. Some of the soldiers who had their canteens filled used the water to cool the guns. Red Cloud admitted some years later that he lost half of his men, and he had about 3,000 warriors.

"The Indians were dazed at their terrible loss, for they had never before met a number of determined men with breech-loading rifles. They always spoke of this fight as the battle in which the whites made 'bad medicine.' Indians are very superstitious, and anything which goes wrong is attributed to 'bad medicine.' When Major Smith relieved the men, they were so nearly exhausted that they could not have resisted another attack. Some of them, including Major Powell, never recovered from the effects of the terrible strain."

"How did the Sioux recover their dead and wounded?" asked the boys.

"An Indian would crawl up," Pete re-

lated, " under cover of bushes or trees or under his war-shield, fasten a rope to a foot or hand, and other Indians would drag the body away, but those near the corral they did not get, till we had left. Believe me, we were glad to leave and did not stop to count the dead."

When Pete would not talk any more about the battle, the boys went outside to cut some wood, but the storm was so bad that it was impossible to stay outside more than a few minutes at a time. So they brought in long sticks and fed the ends into the fire after the manner known as the " lazy man's camp-fire."

In the afternoon Pete grew impatient of being idle and, the rope in one hand and the shovel in the other, he started out to find the horses.

In ten minutes he crawled back into the tepee looking like a live snow-man, with his eyes and mouth closed with frozen snow.

" It is no use, men," he said, brushing the snow out of his eyes; " if I had not held on to the rope, I could not have found the tepee

again. We cannot do a thing for the poor beasts. Thank God, we reached shelter and had time to set up the tepee. If we had not, we should have frozen to death. This is the worst blizzard I ever saw, and it is getting terribly cold."

"A winter campaign," remarked Joe, "was bad enough south of the Arkansas, but in a storm like this, troops and horses would freeze to death. In this northern country the soldiers would be as helpless as the Indians."

Late in the afternoon boys and men had another big meal, and at dusk they wrapped themselves in their robes and blankets for another long sleep, with the storm roaring as fiercely as ever, and the night again turning pitch-dark.

The next morning, however, the storm had moderated, but the weather had turned so bitterly cold that nothing but buffalo coats and fur caps kept out the icy blast.

After a quick breakfast, all four of them started out to look for the horses.

Where were they? Had they strayed off

before the wind and were lost or frozen to death? In that case men and boys might have to go back once more to Fort Totten and stay there until spring. If indeed they could ever reach Fort Totten on foot.

It was now possible to see objects at a distance of fifty yards, about half the length of a city block.

For half an hour, they searched along the side of the butte, and the lads began to fear that Pete and Joe would lose their bearing in the storm. But Pete explained that the wind was coming from the northwest and was not likely to change for many hours.

"If the snow does not come down any thicker," he promised, "I can find the way back, because I can tell by the wind that we are now going east."

Joe and Pete feared that the horses might not have found any good shelter because they did not know the country.

"If this was their home country," Joe declared, "I would not look for them at all in this weather. I would feel sure that they had found shelter as quickly as wild animals.

Let us look for them in this small canyon. I think it is what plainsmen call a box-canyon."

To their great joy they came suddenly upon four of the animals, huddled together under a cliff, and half buried in a snow-drift. One of the animals neighed when he heard the voices of the men.

"There they are! There they are!" shouted Don. "I bet they are glad to see us."

The animals did not seem to be much the worse for their experience, although they looked thin and cold.

"Don't you think their feet are frozen?" Don wondered.

"I have often thought of that myself," Pete replied. "I have known of horses having their ears frozen in a storm, but their feet don't seem to freeze, although it is a riddle to me how they keep them warm. The jack-rabbit has his toes encased in a sort of fur boot, but the foot of a horse is perfectly bare. The poor critters are hungry, and we must feed them."

The boys looked at each other in surprise. "What can we feed them?" they asked.

"Dig them out," Pete told the boys, "and then take them over to those cottonwoods and cut down a few trees for them. Yes, I mean it," he added as the boys looked doubtfully at each other. "Cut down a few trees for them, while Joe and I look for the others."

After some time the men brought two more horses, and the lads saw with wonder how the horses peeled the branches of the cottonwood and ate the bark with great relish.

"Did you never hear of horses eating bark?" Pete asked. "If an Indian pony has plenty of cottonwood bark, he will keep in fairly good condition. We are real Indians now, for they never do any more for their ponies than cut down some cottonwoods for them."

The other two horses could not be found. "They may be dead, and buried in a snowdrift," Pete explained, "or they may have wandered off some distance. If we do not

find them again, we have to get along with those that we have found. A good many Indian ponies die every winter, and most of those that live through the winter are very poor and weak in spring."

CHAPTER XXII

UNSEEN DANGER

For several days the weather was so cold that both men and boys were glad to stay in camp the greater part of the day. They cut dry wood for their fire, for they had all learned to agree with Pete that a tepee with a fire in it is apt to be a smoke-house, unless the wood is dry and the fire is carefully tended.

"An Indian," remarked Pete when the boys wiped the tears out of their eyes, "likes a little smoke. If you boys want to play Indians, a few wreaths of smoke should not bother you."

Pete and Joe discovered that their camp was only a few rods from the Little Missouri, and they cut a hole through the ice to get water. It had been a revelation to the boys to learn how slowly a pailful of snow would melt and how little water it made.

"Here, lads, take a good drink," Joe

called, when the men returned with two pails of water. "That snow-water is pretty flat stuff for drinking; and it takes all day to melt enough for our needs."

The boys looked after the horses by cutting down some more cottonwoods for them, and never got over admiring the way in which the hungry animals peeled the boughs and branches clean, and they wondered how the Indian ponies learned that cottonwood bark was as good as grass or hay.

"Don't you know that all horses have a liking for bark?" Joe reminded them. "Don't you remember that Uncle Reuben told you never to tie his horse to a tree? Even a farm horse or carriage horse, that had plenty of grass and hay, will start eating bark, if you tie him to a tree for any length of time. The teeth of a horse seem to be made for peeling bark, while cows, deer, and buffaloes have no front teeth in the upper jaw and they find peeling bark pretty hard work."

Although the campers ate only two meals a day, their meat was going very fast, and

as soon as the weather moderated a little all four of them went on a deer hunt. The game had all left the open country and had sought shelter in the small groves and thickets of the valley, and they secured two fat deer within a mile of the camp.

Hank and Don were proud boys, indeed, when they rode back to camp, each with a whole deer behind the saddle. "Now we have plenty of meat for a long time," Don exclaimed. "Joe, you surely didn't lie about the game in this country. Wouldn't the boys in the city stare if they could see us now? I wish I could write to Fatty Jones and Skip Tompkins. They said we would be afraid to go right into the buffalo country, but I would rather eat venison than buffalo. Wouldn't you, Joe?

The old soldier smiled, pleased at the enthusiasm of the lad.

"No," he answered, "I prefer fat young buffalo beef. One can eat that longer without tiring of it than any other kind of wild meat, including turkeys and prairie-chickens."

HANK AND DON WERE PROUD BOYS, INDEED, WHEN THEY RODE BACK TO CAMP.—*Page 224.*

"Oh, Joe," called Don, "there sits a big jack-rabbit. I see the black tips of his ears. May I get him?"

"All right," assented Joe. "I don't see him yet. He is hardly worth a shot, but get him if you can. I'll cook us a hunter's stew of rabbit, and liver, heart, and tripe of the deer. We must not waste any good meat."

"Deer tripe?" questioned Hank. "What is tripe?"

"The large stomach of all cud-chewing animals like deer, elk, moose, buffalo, cattle, and sheep. We can wash it in the river, and you will find it mighty fine eating when boiled in a stew."

"Do the Indians eat it?" inquired Don.

"They certainly do," Pete chuckled as if he thought of some funny incidents. "When meat is scarce the Indians waste nothing of their game. They eat everything except the skin and bones, and they split the leg-bones to eat the marrow-fat."

"If it is good fat we shall eat it," declared the boys. "We did not like fat meat in town, but here we like the fat meat best."

" How do the Indians clean their game? " asked Don.

" Wall, boys, I tell you," Pete explained laughing, " if you want to know that, just read what Lewis and Clark tell about it. Joe has the book in his saddle-bag. I once saw some Indians in Minnesota who had killed a moose. Wall, you may believe it or not, those Injuns camped near the moose till they eat it up, the hull of it. Just like Lewis and Clark's Injuns eat the deer.

" Injuns reason that deer and moose and buffalo do not eat anything unclean, so there cannot be anything unclean in them. Well, you fellows had better read Lewis and Clark. For a white man, Indians are not very clean cooks, or very clean in anything."

" Hurry up a little, you fellows, all three of you," Joe broke into their talk; " we have to skin our deer and cut up the meat before it freezes stiff. You can do your talking after supper. Get some more wood, you boys, and see that the horses are all right."

The boys could hardly wait till the hunter's stew was done and all four of the camp-

ers ate such quantities of meat that Joe declared laughing they would have to go after buffalo and elk if he was to be cook for such a wolfish crew.

"The way you are eating, you need five or six pounds of meat a day, each one of you, and the venison will scarcely last us a week. We have to live on the country now, and save our little flour and other food we brought with us, but you can each have a biscuit of hardtack to-night, for this chief is making a big feast for his two young hunters."

Although the weather had moderated a good deal, it was still bitterly cold; and both Joe and Pete did not consider it safe to start on their long journey to Bozeman with the prospect of wearing out or losing their horses. Both agreed that they ought to remain on the Little Missouri till most of the snow had melted or had been absorbed by the dry air of the plains.

In this broken country, the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri, they felt sure of finding enough game for themselves, and enough

grass or cottonwoods to keep their horses alive. The shelter for themselves and their beasts was as good as could be found anywhere on the Northern Plains, and all the four campers were in fine health.

There was only one thing which gave them much anxiety. How far were they from the nearest Indian camp? True, they had seen no sign of Sioux since they left Fort Totten, but both Joe and Pete had had too much experience with Indians to let this fact lull them into a feeling of careless security.

Some of the Indians on Devil's Lake had told Cactus Pete that the country on the Little Missouri was a favorite winter camping-ground of Sitting Bull and his people.

The Little Missouri, as its name implies, is but a small stream compared with its great namesake, which drains nearly the whole of the Great Plains and a large part of the Rocky Mountains, a region as large as France, Great Britain, and Germany together. During the days of our story the Missouri was navigated by steamboats from

St. Louis to Fort Benton, Montana, a distance of some 3,000 miles by river.

Compared with this mighty stream, one of the great rivers of the earth, Wakpa-sheeka, the Little Missouri is only a small river. But compared with the rivers of Europe and the smaller streams of this country, it is not so insignificant, and it drains one of the most picturesque and romantic regions of the West, the Bad Lands of North Dakota, one of the regions of our country not yet discovered by our tourists and our painters, like the rugged Black Hills and Bad Lands of South Dakota.

" Bad Lands " the old traders and trappers called them, but " Enchanted Lands " would be a far more appropriate name. Through the " Enchanted Lands " of North Dakota, Wakpa-sheeka, the Little Missouri winds its way for more than two hundred miles.

To tell of its buttes and mesas, its canyons and plains, its bold cliffs and castellated rocks, its great lignite beds, running as broad black seams in the cliffs along the turbid

winding stream, would require another book. Many of these great beds of very soft coal caught fire a long, long time ago. In burning, they baked the soft clay into a hard rock, and colored it with the bright red of burnt brick, and left great masses of glassy slag scattered on hills and slopes. The country looks as if created in a great catastrophe of nature, but all the strange, wonderful scenery was made by the slow and steady working forces of rain and wind, of carving creeks and rivers, with here and there a touch of fire; but of earthquakes and volcanoes there have been none.

It was in the Enchanted Lands of the Little Missouri that the late President Roosevelt learned to love the West and the life of the cowboy and rancher.

The Bad Lands of the Little Missouri was one of the regions loved by the wild buffaloes, elk, deer, and mountain sheep. It was one of the regions the Sioux loved and were ready to fight for, and Indians do love their tribal home as intensely as any white man ever loved his native land. No white

man suffers more from homesickness than an Indian.

In a dry season, the Little Missouri is only a small creek, and it may even run dry in places. But when the snow melts or the rain falls, it quickly becomes a real river, gathering the muddy waters from a thousand small creeks and gullies, nearly all of them dry a few days or hours after the rain, and it drains an area of 7,500 square miles, only 1,000 square miles less than the whole State of Massachusetts.

Apparently a country of this size is large enough for many Indians and white men to camp in and roam over and never meet, but it must be remembered that the Plains Indians were horse Indians, and that in good weather, mounted on their enduring ponies, a journey of a hundred miles or two meant nothing to them.

Joe and Pete had many times discussed the probable location of the winter camps of the hostile Sioux; and always reluctantly came to the conclusion that, at least, one of the hostile chiefs, most likely Sitting Bull,

was north of the Yellowstone, probably somewhere on the Little Missouri.

"Hang them all, Joe," Pete would say when he warmed up in the discussion, "them Indians can't all camp on the Powder and the Rosebud or the Big Horn. Thar's too many of them. They have to scatter to find feed for their ponies. The Little Missouri country is good Indian country. Plenty of grass, water, shelter, and cottonwoods, and plenty of game. I'll eat my shirt, Joe, if we can't see smoke from one of the high buttes.

"I don't fear them Indians as long as thar ain't more than five to one against us, but I didn't make a bet to capture Sitting Bull and his hull camp. It wouldn't surprise me, if the old devil had his camp within five miles of us. In that case, we want to pack up and get out before his young bucks see our smoke."

"Maybe you are right, Pete," Joe had to admit. "One can't see any distance in this confusion and wilderness of buttes and cliffs. I say we scout for Indians to-morrow,

if it doesn't blow and is not too horribly cold."

"That's the game," Pete agreed. "Nary another day should we stay here without learning if we have any Sioux neighbors."

CHAPTER XXIII

SCOUTING FOR INDIANS

NEXT morning the four campers left their spare horses peeling cottonwood bark and started for Sentinel Butte, the highest point in the present State of North Dakota and only about fifteen miles from their camp, which had been located near the present town of Medora, the romantic story of which we have not space to tell.

The weather was no longer severely cold, but both Don and Hank scouted on foot from time to time in order to keep warm; for a man on horseback is always exposed to the full force of the wind.

Sentinel Butte, one of many lone, steep hills scattered over the great plain, was clearly visible as soon as the horsemen had climbed out of the valley of the Little Missouri.

"Hank, let's make a run for it," Don

challenged his brother. "It is only about three miles off."

Pete and Joe had no objection to the boys' riding ahead, but cautioned them not to get their horses heated.

The boys rode along at a brisk gait, but there was something strange about that butte, for after an hour's ride, it seemed as far as ever.

"Let us wait for the men," said Hank; "we are not getting any nearer to that butte."

"What is the matter?" asked Joe. "Have you struck an Indian trail?"

"No," replied Hank, "we have not. We just stopped to ask Pete if he had ever seen a sliding mountain."

"What do you mean?" Pete asked, off his guard for a moment.

"That butte," Hank asserted as if talking to Joe, "has been sliding west all morning. It is farther away now than it was when we started."

"Off with ye! Ye scamps," Pete broke in now and threatened the lads with his riding-

quirt. "Off with ye!" he repeated. "That thar butte was fifteen miles off when we started for it, and I reckon it is still a little better than ten miles to windward. It's the clear air. On the Pacific coast you can see some mountains a hundred miles away. Off with ye, and be careful you don't freeze your faces!"

When the lads were at a safe distance, Don turned in the saddle: "Hey, Mr. Pete Lawrence!" he called, "do you remember when that mountain was a hole in the ground?"

In answer Pete swung his quirt over his head and pretended to be whipping up his pony, and the boys, with a shout, disappeared over a ridge.

In about two hours more, they all arrived at the foot of the butte, where they picketed their horses, although the feed was very poor. Most of the dead grass was covered by snow, while the tufts of sage-brush that projected above the white blanket only added to the inhospitable appearance of the country.

Pete sat down in the sun under the lee of a rock to remain with the horses, while the others climbed to the flat top of Sentinel Butte about eight hundred feet above the plain.

From this point a wild wintry landscape was spread out below them. It seemed to the boys that they could see fifty miles in every direction. They searched every valley and depression amongst the lower red-topped buttes and every patch of cotton-woods, willows, and bushes of buffalo-berry for signs of human life. They made out, through Joe's glass, several small bands of buffaloes, elk, and antelopes, but no haze of smoke was visible anywhere. A wilderness of red buttes, gray walls, black coal seams, and rugged hummocks stretched away north and south along the winding valley of the Little Missouri, while east and west a glittering snow-covered plain met the horizon.

"No signs of Indians," reported the scouts, when they returned to Pete, who seemed to have taken a nap in the sunshine.

"I didn't expect them here," remarked

Pete, " but I reckon we shall see enough of them if we climb Bullion Butte."

" Which one is that? " asked Don.

" That hill over yonder, southeast from here, about fifteen or twenty miles away," Pete pointed out.

" What is your weather forecast, Pete? " asked Joe. " Is it safe to strike out for it to-day? "

" Clear to-day and to-morrow, but more storms next week," predicted Pete with grave assurance. " Let us make a good job of this scouting, while we are at it. The weather may not be much warmer till April."

So they struck off across the country for Bullion Butte, a little more than fifteen miles south of Medora. Wrapped in their big coats they rode straight across the plain. When they crossed Warner Creek, they stopped long enough to cut through the ice in a water-hole to refresh themselves and the ponies with a good drink.

The horses travelled as if rather unwilling to go farther away from camp.

"They are getting tired and hungry," declared Pete. "Mules would have stood up much better."

"Why didn't you come on a mule?" retorted Joe. "I would not ride one of the contrary critters."

The boys wondered if it was safe to leave the camp and the other horses over night.

"No, it is not very safe," admitted Joe. "Nothing is very safe on these plains, but I always disliked dividing a small party. It always means that one will be worrying about the safety of the other."

The boys were surprised at the endurance of the ponies, which had eaten nothing but the poorest kind of grass and cottonwood bark ever since the travellers were caught in the storm. The little beasts seemed to understand now that they were not to return to the home camp for the night, and plodded along stubbornly as if they knew what was expected of them.

The boys were feeling more hungry than tired and hoped that they would not have to climb Bullion Butte before supper.

The sun was getting rather low, when quite suddenly the deep valley of a creek opened up before the travellers only a mile from the foot of the great butte.

"Pete, what do you think of this spot?" asked Joe as he stopped his pony in a patch of small cottonwoods.

"I reckon it is as good as any other," commented Pete. "You and the lads might set up camp, while I do a little climbing and scouting."

In less than an hour Pete was back. "All is quiet on the Little Missouri, as far as my old eyes can make out in the dusk," he reported. "Hand me a piece of your venison 'chuck,' my stomach is calling. Joe, that fire looks mighty homey."

While men and boys were eating their meat and enjoying copious draughts of sweet hot tea, the ponies were eagerly peeling the cottonwoods, which the boys had cut for them.

"Your Boston riding-school horses would not take very much to these cottonwood oats," remarked Pete. "We must give Joe

credit for being a good horse-trader. The Kiowas surely taught him something useful."

"Yes," replied Joe smiling, "they also taught me to be modest. He-Knocks-His-Head is not a name to make a man boastful."

For a while the men kept the fire replenished, while they chatted of the events of the day and speculated as to the location of Sitting Bull's camp.

"I hope the old fellow did not locate north of us," Pete concluded. "In that case his young men will be sure to straggle up to our camp, for the valley gets deeper down-stream, and the hunting is not so good."

The stars now twinkled brilliantly and the moon showed buttes, crags, and cliffs in bold relief, while it cast rugged black shadows into the valley. The coyotes howled and yapped close by and the gray wolves began their wild song in the distance. A buck that had been attracted by the camp-fire snorted at the intruders of his solitude and stamped about in a willow thicket for half an hour.

"Can't we drive him out?" asked Don. "He makes me feel as if there were Indians around us."

"Let him alone, boys," requested Joe. "He will go as soon as he has satisfied his curiosity. Picket the horses and let us go to bed. It seems hard to restrict the poor beasts on this winter range, but I fear they might start for the home camp before we are ready."

All four of the campers exchanged their boots for moccasins and leggins, each one selected a suitable spot, rolled himself into his blankets and buffalo robe, and slept Indian fashion with his head under cover.

In the morning after breakfast, Pete and the boys climbed the butte, while Joe stayed in camp with the horses. The boys wanted Joe to come along, but Pete objected.

"We take no chances on losing the horses," he protested. "I have seen too many Indians jump out of the ground, and we don't want to run any foot-races in this country."

"Indians?" exclaimed the boys. "Have you seen any?"

"No I haven't, but we take no chances. One of us stays with the horses."

The view from Bullion Butte was even more rugged, with a great number of lower red-topped buttes close by than could be seen from Sentinel Butte. For Bullion Butte rises in a typical Bad Land region and close to the Little Missouri.

But Pete had no eyes for scenery. Glass in hand he was scanning the winding river toward the southwest. While the lads were still lost in wonder at the fantastic scene, the like of which is not found in all the Eastern States, Pete called them to come back to camp with him.

"Bad news!" he called to Joe. "Sitting Bull's camp is right over there, about fifteen miles away."

"Did you see the camp?"

"No, not the camp, but the smoke is plain as day, and you and I know that means Indian camp. They are too close to us, Joe, only thirty miles. We must strike out for Bozeman or find a safer camp. When the weather gets a little warmer we are likely to have visitors any day."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MOUNTAIN ON FIRE

THE men lost no time in getting started for the home camp, choosing the route down the valley of the Little Missouri.

In almost every sheltered nook and in every patch of timber they found both white-tail and black-tail deer or elk. Bands of bighorn sheep stood watching them from the cliffs and flat tops of many buttes, while small herds of buffaloes and antelopes had already returned to their upland grazing grounds, where the snow had not lodged. The animals were so fearless that they often let the horsemen approach within a stone's throw.

"That is a good sign," declared Pete. "If the Indians had been after them they would be much wilder."

Of bird life they saw but little, except sage-hens and chattering magpies; and one

golden eagle was seen sailing in great spirals down the valley. The men did no hunting, because they had still plenty of meat at the camp.

The horses, although they had never been over the route, seemed to know where the party was going, and the steep walls of the valley sheltered the horsemen so well from the wind that the trip was very pleasant.

Only one thing made Joe and Pete feel uneasy, and that was the condition of their ponies. The animals all began to show signs of exhaustion and hunger.

" If they were not Indian ponies," Joe declared, " we would have a hard time getting them back to camp. This snow has covered up so much of the good grass that it leaves them pretty poor picking."

The party reached the home camp in the middle of the afternoon, without seeing any other Indian signs, except what they had seen from Bullion Butte.

" I hope," said Pete, " it will snow and blow a little, before any Sioux hunters strike our trail."

They found their other horses about a mile from camp, and after cutting down a few cottonwoods, they turned all the animals loose.

Pete and Joe discussed all the dangers of settling down in a permanent winter camp and of starting at once for Bozeman.

They agreed that for the present they could not hope to complete the journey without the loss of some of their ponies, and without giving those that held out several days of rest from time to time, whenever they should reach a good and safe camping ground.

If on this journey they fell in with Indians, they feared that they could neither flee nor fight. Their horses would not be able to make speed unless all equipment was abandoned; and if the men made a stand, they would not be able to dig any rifle-pits, because the ground was frozen hard; and they were still nearly seven hundred miles from Bozeman.

On the other hand, if they put up a good strong camp in some sheltered and secluded

spot farther down the Little Missouri, they would have little difficulty in bringing all their animals through the winter. About their own food supply they felt no uneasiness. Pete said he could alone bring in enough game to feed a whole company.

As far as the danger of Indian attack was concerned it seemed entirely reasonable to expect that in a broken country of 7,000 square miles a party of only four men might escape detection altogether.

"I have fooled them on many a scouting trip," Pete argued, "and I believe we could do it again. For a small party to vanish away, there is no better country than the Bad Lands on the lower Little Missouri."

If the worst happened and they were discovered and attacked, they would be able to give a good account of themselves.

"Give me a good camp, well built and well placed, and it will take a big bunch of Sioux to prod us out," Pete felt confident. "Our breech-loaders and Colt's would send them more bad medicine than they would care to swallow."

So it was decided to find a good place and stay in the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri all winter.

"It is the only safe thing," Joe explained. "After the new grass is out, we can travel day or night without fear of wearing out our horses; and if we get hard pressed we can abandon everything except the horses we ride and our guns and ammunition. Let us make a winter camp of it, boys. We don't care when we get to Bozeman, as long as we all get there with our hair on. We'll have a bully time hunting and scouting, sleeping and spinning yarns, and you fellows will have time to learn the Bible and Lewis and Clark by heart.

"Here is 'how' for our winter camp in the Bad Lands!"

For several days the weather turned blustery, with high winds and light snowfalls. "Great weather for us!" exclaimed Joe. "It will keep the young rascals of Sitting Bull in camp gambling and feasting and love-making, and when they do come out, they will discover no signs of our trail. I

should like to see their puzzled faces when they find our old camp-fires! They will know at once that white men have been there, and they will have big talks trying to figure out where the white men came from and where they went."

Two days they allowed their horses to rest, then they broke camp to look for a better and safer place farther down the Little Missouri, going northward from the present town of Medora.

Of the two lost horses they had discovered no trace, so the number of their animals was reduced to six, which were all in fair condition in spite of the cold weather and scant fare.

They travelled in the sheltered valley, crossing the winding river many times. The scenery became even more rugged than it was near their temporary camp. The first day they rode along leisurely without trying to find a permanent camp. In the middle of the afternoon they stopped for the night.

When supper had been eaten and the horses were all safely picketed, they sat for

an hour around a big red camp-fire fed by dry cottonwood logs, for they had seen no signs of Indians and both Joe and Pete felt that there was no need of concealing their presence.

On the second day they came to the mouth of a creek now known as Beaver Creek, which, through a deep valley, enters the Little Missouri from the west. This side valley looked like a good hiding-place to Pete and Joe and they ascended it for a few miles and made camp near a burning coal-bed.

They set up their tepee, so they would have time to build their fort at leisure.

In the morning Joe and Pete selected a site only a few rods from the place where the lignite was slowly smoldering underground, emitting smoke and steam from wide cracks in the clay rock above.

It seemed to the boys a strange and uncanny place for a camp.

"Won't the fire run along and drive us out?" asked the lads.

"No danger of that," Pete assured them. "These underground fires do not run like

prairie fires; they burn very, very slowly. I think it has probably taken more than ten years for this one acre of ground to burn over."

"Ten years?" exclaimed Don, much astonished. "How long did it take to burn and bake all those great layers of red clay which Joe says were made by the burning of great coal-beds?"

"How long that took?" Joe repeated Don's question. "Nobody knows; probably many thousand years. The Indians have no tradition of the burning of the great beds that have disappeared between this place and Sentinel Butte, Bullion Butte and other large and high buttes. The Indians believe that the Bad Lands have always been as they are now, but geologists say that the country was once very different. About a thousand feet of rock has been washed away between the great buttes, and thousands of square miles of coal have been burnt."

Don was silent for a minute.

"Was the whole country," he asked then, "at one time as high as the big buttes?"

"That is what it was," Joe explained. "It was a great rolling prairie like the country around Fort Totten."

"What became of the missing land and the great layers of rock and clay?"

"The rains and creeks washed them into the big Missouri and at last into the sea."

"Why don't they wash away the buttes now?"

"They are washing them away," Joe claimed. "A little of them every spring and with every shower. All the fine mud in the creeks and rivers from the buttes and the cliffs is on its way to the sea, and some of it is being dropped in the Gulf of Mexico every day."

"Here, you fellows," Pete called out, "come and lend a hand! Joe, you can set up school when our fort is done. I want a lot of bricks now and some mortar. We are going to build a brick camp, one that can't burn up when the fire reaches us.

"Joe, you had better bring me a lot of those red rocks, or any kind of rock, and you boys bring some clay and mud."

"We have nothing to carry it in," said Hank, looking around helplessly.

"Get to work!" Pete called impatiently. "Use a piece of canvas and take hold of the corners. It is going to be a warm day. When it blows we can't work. We want to get this done before old Sitting Bull comes to pay us a friendly call. Get to work, all three of you!"

In the evening a good part of the wall was up.

"That is a rough-looking house we are building," exclaimed Don. "The walls look just like a piece of cliff."

"That is the way we want them to look," Pete agreed, laughing. "We are not building for show."

The boys soon entered into the fun of building a real fort. For several days they carried rocks, clay and mud, or whatever Pete called for. The mud was hard to get. They had to chop away the ice first and then dig out the mud from the bottom of the creek.

Pete worked like one who had built shacks

and dugouts before; and the boys admitted that he made a good job of it. He even built a rough fireplace with a chimney above it.

"Now we will try the draft," he said. "If our fireplace smokes you will have to bring me some more rocks for the chimney. I learned this game from a fellow soldier, who was a bricklayer before he enlisted. He and I built fireplaces at Fort Buford and Fort Phil Kearney. He was killed with Fetterman."

The chimney worked so well that the four builders cooked their supper at the fireplace. Before it grew dark Joe brought some cottonwood stumps, and Pete told stories of Fort Phil Kearney, while the hot red fire baked the clay and mud in the chimney, and when the stumps were burnt up the campers sought their beds in the tepee.

The next problem was to provide their fort with a roof and a door; and the boys marvelled again at the resourcefulness of the two old soldiers.

From a projecting layer of slanting hard

rock in the cliff they laid slanting poles to the wall of the cabin. The poles they covered with a layer of willow brush, and over the brush they stretched the two deer hides they had brought along and a piece of old canvas. Then they covered the whole with earth and sod, which they brought from a warm south-facing hillside.

"In a few days," chuckled Pete, "we shall move into our house! This tepee life is all right for an Injun, but it warn't ever meant for a white man."

No boys ever enjoyed more the building of their shacks,—and what strange shacks boys do build!—than these boys and men enjoyed building their winter fort in the Bad Lands, and no wild animal ever hid his den more effectively.

"A pretty good job you made of it," Joe granted as the four sat and looked at their fort from a few hundred yards away, "but the chimney will give us away."

"I'll fix that," declared Pete. "You three run and bring me some more rocks, the roughest ones you can find."

When Pete had finished piling those around the chimney top, both Joe and the boys had to admit that the shack and its roof looked so much like a natural part of the cliff that no one could tell it was a campers' shack or fort till he came right up to it.

For the door, Pete resorted to the device of the Indians by fastening a tanned buffalo skin in such a way that it neatly closed the entrance. This door was partly hidden from view by a gnarly red cedar, against the trunk of which they piled a few rocks to make the concealment complete.

"You forgot to put in a window," Hank teased the builder, "and the smoke from the chimney will give us away."

"You go and camp in the snow if you don't like my shack," Pete replied curtly. "We don't need a window. The open door or the fire will give us plenty of light.

"Come down with me to the creek and I'll show you something about the smoke.

"There," Pete pointed out when the four campers had reached the creek, "none of you could tell, if you didn't know it, that our

chimney smoke does not come out of the burning cliff. I fixed the top so that the smoke sort of has to spread out."

Joe and the boys had to admit that the appearance of the whole fort was most deceptive.

"I don't believe," said Pete, "any Indians would go near this burning coal-bed; they are too superstitious about everything unusual."

The horses found in the sheltered valley of the creek a good winter pasture; and for emergencies, quite a supply of cottonwoods was available.

One or two of the party went every day to look at the horses, but the animals were doing well and showed no inclination to leave the little sheltered valley.

When everything in Pete's shack was ready, the campers took down their tepee and cached their supplies under some canvas and buffalo skins behind their fort.

A fort indeed they had built. Pete had not forgotten to put in a number of portholes, closed now with pieces of buckskin,

which, however, could be pulled out in a second.

Wood for the fireplace was fairly abundant, both cottonwood and red cedar, but their main supply for keeping their den warm was the lignite, which the boys simply had to pick up and carry inside.

Two raised sleeping-places, one for the boys and one for the men, was all the inside "fixings" Pete put in. The bunks, as the boys called them, also served as seats, and a neatly tanned buckskin spread on the ground served as table and table-cloth.

Cactus Pete uttered a grunt of satisfaction when he stretched himself on the comfortable bunk after supper the first evening.

"The best bed I ever lay on; beats them mattress beds in the big Planters Hotel in St. Louis," he vowed. "The Planters is sure a fine place, but I'll be dinged if I wouldn't rather camp here in our den in these here Bad Lands. Old St. Louis and Boston beat us on fixings, but they can't touch us on scenery. These Bad Lands are sure a bewitched-looking country."

"Not bewitched," Joe corrected him, "'enchanted' is the word."

"Wall, bewitched or enchanted, it's sure a strange country," Pete continued. "Looks to me as if Old Harry tried to bust up the hull earth for the Lord and come well-nigh doing it."

"Pete, you have lived too long with the Indians," Joe bantered him. "Old Harry had nothing to do with making these Enchanted Lands. The Lord carved them out Himself with rains and streams."

"Did He light the coal-beds, too?" queried Pete skeptically. "It looks to me as if Old Harry tried pretty hard to stake out a claim here.

"Wall, I suppose these college fellows know what they are talking about, but how are coal-beds set on fire?"

"By lightning, by man, and by spontaneous combustion."

"Spontaneous what?"

"Spontaneous combustion. They just begin to burn of themselves, that's what it means."

"Joe, you are a bigger liar than I ever hope to be. Thar ain't no such thing. You needn't try to fool an old man with your book learning."

"Yes, there is, Pete," Hank ventured to come in. "When Uncle Reuben's machine-shop caught fire, the insurance men said it was a case of spontaneous combustion. A careless workman had thrown a pile of oiled rags and wipings into a corner and they had started to burn of their own accord."

"I don't believe a word of it," Pete protested. "You fellows are trying to get even with me.

"Wall, I reckon I can hold my own when it comes to telling stories, but if any man ever starts to hum a reveille in this fort, I shall give him a dose of spontaneous tumbling down the bank. These blarney reveilles have haunted me for fourteen years and I am going to make up lost sleep in this camp."

That first night, however, Pete did not make up much sleep. He had just finished a story about Fort Phil Kearney, when there

was a dull crash and a cannon-like explosion outside. At the same time a violent tremor went through the cliff, and the rock cabin was shaken so violently that some of Pete's mortar fell out of the joints.

"Indians!" called Don, jumping up from his bunk.

"Don, you're plumb foolish!" Hank cried. "Indians can't make the rocks tremble. It's an earthquake."

"The mountain is on fire, the mountain is burning up!" the lads called, when they rushed out through the skin door.

The mountain was indeed on fire. Where, thus far, only smoke and steam had issued, blue and red flames flickered out of a long crevice, which had just formed in the bed of clay overlying the burning coal-bed.

"There is your earthquake," Joe pointed out as the four astonished campers stood within a few feet of the weird flickering flames. "A large piece of burnt clay rock has just caved in, because the lignite had burnt out from under it. Heated gases caused the explosion, and now they are

burning as they come out of the new crevice."

"The all-firedest strange thing I ever saw!" exclaimed Pete. "It's Old Harry's work, I say."

But the boys caught Joe's explanation. "It's a kind of Bad Lands gas-works," remarked Hank. "We once visited the Boston Gas-Works where they make gas by roasting soft coal in long ovens."

In an hour the blue and red flames died away and the campers returned to their cabin.

"Wall, you needn't call me, boys," remarked Pete as he stretched himself under the blankets, "unless old Sitting Bull himself wants to see me. This stone-mason's job is pretty hard work for an old soldier."

CHAPTER XXV

DANGEROUS NEIGHBORS

THE den, that was the name finally applied to Pete's camp, answered every expectation.

It blended so perfectly with the natural layers of rock, clay, and lignite that it looked to the boys like a big swallow's nest stuck to the cliff. It was roomy, and, best of all, when the blizzards roared across the Bad Lands and the temperature fell to forty below zero, it was a warm and cozy den, and the blankets did not become covered with powdered snow.

The absence of a window the campers felt only on those days when it was too stormy or too cold to be outside. In fair weather the horses had to be looked after, game had to be found and packed to camp; and at all times, the campers spent as much time sleeping as nature would permit.

But even on cold and stormy days Joe and Pete overcame the lack of windows and candles. They always kept on hand a supply of split cedar, which burnt with a bright flame, so that the boys lay for hours on their buffalo robes in front of the fireplace reading the great story of Lewis and Clark and those stories in the Good Book which appeal most to young people and of which boys and girls nowadays have altogether too little knowledge.

"The journey of the Israelites through the desert must have been a good deal like a journey through the Bad Lands," observed Joe.

"Yes, like going through the sage-brush country," added Pete, "only worse. You never find any reference to boys fishing or even to crossing rivers. So I reckon that country is a real desert, all right, with no game and almost no water."

Lewis and Clark's journal gave rise to endless discussions. Pete had seen and camped on many of the spots mentioned in the famous diary.

There had not been very much change in the sixty years elapsed since the time of the two great explorers, but Pete and Joe agreed that the end of the old days was at hand.

"Something has got to happen in the Sioux country this next summer," asserted Joe. "White people either have to keep out of the country between the Platte and the Yellowstone, or the Sioux will all have to move on reservations and travel the 'white man's road.' If white men are allowed in the Indian country the buffaloes will be killed off, and that will mean the end of the 'red man's road'; for the wild life of the Plains Indians is impossible without the buffalo. And mark my words, the Sioux are going to put up a desperate fight to keep travelling the 'red man's road.'"

"Right you are," assented Pete. "Custer will have his hands full with the Sioux. He will never catch Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse the way he caught Black Kettle; and white soldiers can no more make a winter

campaign in this northern country than Indians can do it.

"I wish we knew what has happened since we left Fort Totten."

Although the campers now thought themselves quite safe from Indians, they did not neglect precaution. They never entered the valley of the Little Missouri directly from the bottom of their own creek, but always by a détour to west and north; and in the direction from which they had come, they never hunted at all.

Joe and Pete had learned in the army that men must be kept busy to be content, and they kept their two boys busy with hunting, tending the ponies, cutting wood, and other camp duties.

It was, of course, necessary to be extremely saving with ammunition, because their journey was to last so much longer than they had at first planned. No man was allowed to fire at small game, and Joe would not permit the lads to hunt deer and wild sheep with bows and arrows.

"You boys could not kill the animal with

an arrow," he said, " and it would be cruelty to allow a wounded animal to escape."

The boys, however, became quite skilful in using their Indian weapons on jack-rabbits and sage-hens, and this small game added a welcome variety to the larder of the camp.

Almost before the campers realized it, Christmas and New Year had passed, and the short days grew a little longer, although the weather continued to grow colder, so that Joe and his boys appreciated fully Pete's good work of building a comfortable den.

The horses fared remarkably well, because the narrow valley with considerable tree growth afforded them not only good feeding, but good shelter at all times.

When the lads saw how well the horses did, they regretted that they had not started for Bozeman in December. " We could all have been with Father for Christmas," they suggested.

" Yes, we might," Pete admitted. " But most likely we would have hobbled around on crutches with our feet frozen. Believe

me, lads, an old soldier knows what it means to have hands and feet frozen. A man is foolish to make a long journey across the plains in winter, if he does not have to."

When, a few days later, another snowstorm passed over the country, and the weather grew so bad that for two days nobody could go to look after the horses, the boys were glad they were not travelling or camping in the open.

By the first of April the snow had disappeared, except in places where the sun did not strike it, and now Joe and Pete looked every day for signs of Indians, and they did not have to look many days before they discovered what they did not wish to discover.

A few miles up the valley of the Little Missouri they saw the smoke of a camp-fire, and the very next day a party of seven young Indian hunters made their camp near the mouth of the creek.

Joe and Pete felt sure that these Sioux had found, at least, two of the camps of the white men. Would they pass farther down the valley of Wakpa-sheeka? Would they

look for the white men in the canyon of the creek, or would they soon return to their main camp?

The two men discussed these questions with much anxiety. If the Sioux hunted farther down the valley, they would have to return the same way, because the walls of the valley below the mouth of Beaver Creek are so high and steep that there are only very few places where a man on horseback can reach the plain above.

The four whites felt as if they were held in a state of siege. They did not dare to go hunting, for if they were seen or heard, the Indians would be upon them.

"What do you say, Joe," asked Pete, "if we crawled up on them and blew them all into Kingdom Come? They wouldn't have shown us any mercy if they had seen us first."

But Joe would not listen to any such plan.

"They have a right," he held, "to hunt in their own country. It would be plain murder if we attacked them. If they attack us, we have a right to defend ourselves."

"Wall, all right, Joe," growled Pete. "If you had been with us at Fort Phil Kearney, you would not be quite so squeamish. Perhaps we had better go and smoke the peace pipe with them. I wager they would also like to trade ponies with us."

"I'll smoke my own peace pipe right here in this den," retorted Joe. "You can go and see if any of your friends from Fort Phil Kearney are in their camp."

But the next day the Indians made a move which put an end to Pete's and Joe's debate. The Sioux hunters came up the creek and sat down as if for a council, in plain sight, and almost within rifle range of the stone fort.

Fortunately neither the campers nor their horses had ever gone down the creek since the camp had been built, and Pete had insisted that no clothing, or anything else that might betray their presence, was ever left outside the rock den.

"Get your guns ready and pull the rags out of the loopholes!" ordered Joe. "If they discover us and make an attack, we

have to go after them hard. And we can't let them pass our fort up the canyon; for if we do, they will surely steal every one of our horses."

"Right you are, Joe," Pete seconded his friend. "If they discover us, or try to pass our fort, not one of them must ever return to Sitting Bull's camp."

The Indians were apparently also having a heated discussion. One man pointed up the canyon several times.

"He is telling them that the white men have gone that way," Don declared with a tremor in his voice.

"Hank, keep that coal fire going," admonished Pete. "If our smoke changes too much, my ruse might fail to work."

"If they were white men," Joe felt sure, "they would come up to warm themselves at the burning coal-bed or at least to take a look at it. I am right glad that Indians are superstitious."

Now the Indians arose and came toward the creek. Now they stopped and looked at the smoldering coal-bed and at the smoke

rising out of Pete's concealed chimney. The man, who seemed to be the leader, now seemed to point directly at the fort.

The four white campers held their breath and each man seized his rifle.

"By Jove, they're coming!" whispered Pete and placed the muzzle of his rifle in a loophole and took careful aim at the leader. "Each one of you cover your man," he added.

"Wait, Pete, don't fire!" pleaded Joe; but he and the boys each covered an Indian. "Look," continued Joe, "three of them are mere boys, not more than fourteen years old. Don't fire at them!"

"Hang 'em all," whispered Pete angrily. "Them Indian boys and the squaws are the worst devils when it comes to torturing captives to death. They are all brutes. If they approach another rod, down they come! All of them!"

Again the Indians stopped and looked for a minute up the canyon and directly at the fort, then they turned and walked slowly down the creek.

"Thank Heaven," murmured Joe, "I believe they are going."

"Hang the red rascals!" muttered Pete. "I am afraid they think they have smelled white men." And he crawled carefully out of the den like a wolf and peered down the creek from behind the roots and rocks at the foot of the old cedar.

In a little while he came back. "Blazed I am!" he growled, "they are going! But I don't trust them. These red heathen are pretty foxy. But I can't stand it much longer. If they don't get out of here pretty soon we shall have to blow their heads off. They are too dangerous as neighbors."

That evening there was no laughter and no loud talking in the white men's den. The boys were asked to keep the fire going, but Pete hung a buffalo robe in front of the fireplace so that no ray of light would be visible outside.

After dark Pete put on his cap and moccasins, took his rifle and cartridge belt and slipped out of the den.

"Pete, you aren't going to do anything heathenish?" asked Joe.

"I am just going to do a little quiet scouting on my friends," Pete answered with a grin. "Don't lock me out. I shall be back at bedtime."

In two hours Pete returned. His face looked dark and there was a gleam in his gray eyes.

"The whole gang is sitting around a camp-fire," he reported. "If you fellows had been with me, we could have picked off every man of them. It was the best chance I ever had at any Indians. They think they are safe, but they have their horses picketed near the tepee. How my fingers itched to even up our Fort Kearney score!"

"Pete, you stay in the den after this," said Joe. "I wish we had left you at Fort Totten."

For a short time Pete was silent and seemed to be lost in deep thought.

"I'll tell you something," he began then. "This is getting to be a terribly dangerous

"IT WAS THE BEST CHANCE I EVER HAD AT ANY INDIANS."
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camp. That bunch has been here a week, and it is only a question of time when they will stumble on to our den, or our horses. We can't move while they are here, so they will have to move. I'll give them one more day to get out. If they don't, they are dead Indians! That's my plan.

"Joe, if you had been with us in the wagon-boxes, or had seen the bodies of Fetterman's troop, you wouldn't be quite so squeamish. I swear, if they had caught us, the way I had them, thar wouldn't be a soul of us alive!

"Every man sleeps with his boots on tonight, and this old boy is going to do a little guard duty."

The boys wanted to know why Indians never made attacks at night.

"Another case of superstition," explained Pete. "They think if a man is killed in the dark he has to live in the dark in the other world.

"They will sneak into a camp and steal horses, but they will not fight in the dark, unless they are cornered. And lucky it is

for soldiers and white men that they have this superstition."

Don decided that he would also stay awake, but toward midnight he dropped off in spite of his efforts.

The night was mild and Pete, wrapped in his buffalo robe, spent the greater part of it crouching behind the old cedar in front of the den.

"If any Indian comes crawling around here, I'll know it," he declared.

At daylight he took his rifle and pistols and scouted carefully down the creek.

When he returned he was rather noisy.

"Get up, you rock-rats!" he called. "If you want to bid our beloved neighbors good-bye, you have to hurry. They are packing up. And it's mighty lucky for them that they are going!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MESSENGERS

An hour later the Sioux camp was deserted, only the tepee-poles being left standing.

"Seven men in one tepee," said Hank; "must have made pretty crowded quarters."

"Not for Indians," explained Pete. "They seem to like being crowded, especially in winter. The Plains Indians seldom sleep in the open. Even in summer they build some kind of shelter, and a dozen men will crowd into a brush wickiup that would be too small for half that many white men."

The lads understood now why Joe and Pete had never gone down the creek from their fort. If they had done so the Indians would have found the trail to the fort at once. As it was they had been outwitted by a very simple precaution. Both Joe and

Pete had no doubt that the Sioux had come down the valley in search of the white men, whose camp-sites they had discovered.

"Let us follow them now and give them a good scare," suggested Don. "They had us scared for a week."

"Joe," asked Pete, "what do you think of it? Let us sneak up on them and steal their ponies and make them foot it back to Sitting Bull's camp. The Sioux owe me for a horse and a good mule, which they stole at Fort Phil Kearney, and this is the first chance I have had to even up the score."

"Pete," Joe replied, "you are the worst kid in camp. Are you getting so lonesome that you want to set a bunch of Sioux on your own trail? We shall most likely see enough Indians before we reach Bozeman. Thank the Lord that these did not visit us."

"Let us follow them, anyhow," pleaded the boys, whose love of adventure was stirred at the sight of the camp and the pony trail. "It would be fun to be really trailing Indians. We ought to learn more about Indians before we leave this fort. We will go

and get the ponies. It's a fine day for trailing."

But now Pete had recovered his plainsman's caution. "No, boys," he warned the impetuous lads, "don't be in a hurry. If we start right away their rear scouts might see us, and we should spoil the whole winter's game. We don't really want to see them again, and Joe is right, we sure don't want them to see us, but I should like to know why they came so far down the river?"

"But how can you find out without asking them?" Don wondered.

"Well, if I'm as good a scout as I used to be, I think I could find out," asserted Pete. "If Joe is willing, we shall just stay in camp to-day, cut wood, carry in a lot of coal, and to-morrow we do a little trailing. Let them get a good start so we don't have to worry about running into them."

Joe was willing, and the next morning two happy boys once more jumped into the saddle and with their two friends took up the trail.

"Now, boys," Joe told them, "we are out

for a lark, but we may get into serious trouble if we are not careful. There is to be no shooting and shouting and no loud talk. A good scout is never careless. You stay right with us, unless we ask you to ride ahead. Take the lead now and see that you don't lose the trail, and don't you let the Indians see you first."

The boys found their task much more difficult than they had anticipated. The Indians, it seemed, had always picked out the hardest ground, and had generally followed the meanderings of the river, but in several places they had crossed the river.

Wherever the trail turned a cliff, Joe asked one of the boys to dismount and scout ahead on foot, and he made them approach the mouth of every creek, every side canyon and every patch of timber with great caution.

By noon they had made about ten miles and halted in the pleasant shade of some cottonwoods, still leafless, of course.

"Well, scouts," asked Joe, "what did you learn about those Indians?"

"They made an awfully crooked trail," said Don.

"They rode at a walk," added Hank, "and sometimes they stopped but they did not dismount."

"Is that all you learned?" inquired Pete. "Did they do any hunting?"

"No, they did not," Hank declared.

"Did they see any game?" asked Pete.

"Yes, they did," Don answered eagerly. "They saw elk. There were fresh tracks in one of the groves. I saw a bullet blaze on a tree, and all the elk ran when they were fired at."

"Is that all you know?"

"That is all we learned," both boys admitted.

"Then you are pretty poor scouts. Didn't you learn what was in their mind?"

"How can we tell what was in their mind?" Don asked, thinking Pete was trying to tease them. "We did not even see them."

"Joe and I know," Pete claimed.

"Then you spied them through the glass and saw what they were doing."

"We didn't see them," asserted Pete, "but we know what is in their mind.

"They travelled slowly, they stopped and looked around. And didn't you notice that they had examined every grove of trees, every side canyon and the valley of every creek? Why? They were looking for something. Not for game, or they would have followed the elk. For what? For white men, for us. Those Indians came down the Little Missouri looking for us, and they are still looking for us. They missed us by a hair. I was a little bit afraid their leaving was a ruse to draw us out, but it wasn't. We really fooled them by not hunting and travelling on the Little Missouri and by building that stone shack against the cliff. But it was an all-fired close call for us. They looked right at our fort, but didn't see it.

"They are returning to their tribe, and will tell a big story about a camp of white men who disappeared in the Bad Lands.

"I reckon we have learned enough. The new grass is coming out, and if the weather remains warm, we can start for the Yellowstone in a week.

"Look at the wild crocuses on that hillside! Boys, it's beginning to look and feel like summer.

"I wonder what Custer and the soldiers are doing. We have lived alone in that den so long that we don't know which side of the world is up. Do you believe that I was sorely tempted to have a talk with those Indians? Hanged if I wasn't, Joe. But I was afraid the scoundrels would play us dirt."

A week later the stone fort on Beaver Creek was deserted, and four horsemen with two extra packhorses were on their way to the Yellowstone with nothing but Joe's map and a compass to guide them.

"Why don't we go to Fort Buford near the mouth of the Yellowstone," asked Hank, "and find out what has happened?"

"To Fort Buford?" asked Joe thoughtfully. "Pete, what do you think of it? Do

we want to take another chance on being detained by some captain or colonel of the army? It is also fifty miles out of our way."

"Not on your life," protested Pete. "We have obeyed orders long enough. Let us do our own commanding and strike out for Bozeman as straight as we can. If we get into another blooming fort, there is no telling when we get out again."

After two days' travel they reached the south bank of the Yellowstone, the largest tributary of the Missouri. The Yellowstone was running with a swift current but was still low because the snow water from the mountains had not yet reached the mouth of the river. It was fortunate that the river was still low, but even at low water the Yellowstone cannot be forded.

"How are we going to get across?" asked the boys as they all looked at the swift broad current.

"It is awfully cold," said Don, holding his hand in the water.

"Well, Pete, how are we going to do it?" asked Joe.

Pete suggested that they might try to swim across if the water was not so cold. Or they might make a bull-boat, but that would mean killing a buffalo or big elk and then waiting a few days till the green hide could be shrunk over a frame of poles. But elk and buffaloes had been driven out of this part of the country by soldiers and Indians.

"Let us sleep over it," advised Pete. "But we are now in dangerous country and we must adopt the ways of the Indians and not sleep near our evening camp-fire. After dark let us move into the timber half a mile down the river and away from the bank."

In the morning, Joe and Pete decided to make a raft, which they did by tying three drift-logs together. This raft, however, would float only two men and the baggage. Joe and Hank started across while Pete and Don drove the horses into the river and made them swim over.

Then Hank watched the horses while Joe crossed back and brought Pete and Don over. Of course they could not cross the river straight, and the last landing was

almost a mile below their first starting point.

"Gee!" exclaimed Don, "that was much easier than I thought it would be. Soldiers surely learn to do all kinds of difficult things."

"Hurry up, boys," Pete called, "let us get into the hills. Some Indian scouts might see us puttering around here in the open valley. I am glad we did not have to cross the Missouri with its muddy banks and bottom. You can land a horse almost anywhere on the gravelly banks of the Yellowstone. Untie the ropes from the raft, push the logs into the current and let us move."

They were now on the north side of the river and headed across the open sage-brush valley for the bluffs. After they had gone about three miles northwest, they turned more west over fairly open rolling country.

After some time, they saw two horsemen coming in the opposite direction whom Joe through his glass made out to be soldiers.

"Hurrah, boys!" cried Pete, when he also recognized the coming strangers as soldiers.

"The United States uniform never looked so good to me!"

But what was that? The soldiers had turned their horses toward a wooded ravine.

"Pete, they think we are Indians," called Joe. "Quick, head them off and make them stop!"

Pete, who rode the fastest pony, soon was in sight of them again. He swung his hat in the air, threw off his coat and waved his arms.

"Come back, you boneheads! Can't you see we are white men?" he shouted.

The distance was still much too great for Pete's voice to reach the soldiers, but they had seen his signals and turned to approach him.

"You fellows are great soldiers," old Pete greeted them roughly. "What are you running away for? Did you ever see a bunch of Indians lead any packhorses?"

"You had better go easy, old man," spoke one of the soldiers. "Where in blazes do you come from? We know our business. Only yesterday some blooming Sioux

dressed in white men's clothes pretty near got us. Take warning, old man, if you fellows have to travel in this country, you had better travel after dark. The country is alive with Indians."

By this time both Pete and the soldiers were ready to laugh at their mistakes and rough greeting.

"We were so durned glad to see you," apologized Pete, "that it made me mad to think how near you came giving us the slip."

The soldiers were carrying mail and dispatches from General Gibbon's command, nearly a hundred miles southwest, opposite the mouth of Tongue River, to Fort Buford, fifty miles northeast.

"How are you fixed for 'chuck'?" asked the soldiers.

"Lots of it," replied Pete. "If you aren't in too big a hurry, camp a day with us and tell us about the Indians and the soldiers. We were denned up in the Bad Lands all winter, and don't know a blooming thing."

CHAPTER XXVII

INDIANS AND SOLDIERS

Sergeant Hart and Private Lester were very glad to camp a day with Pete and his friends.

Pete selected a safe place hidden among the hills, the horses were unsaddled and picketed and that was all there was to making camp. The two soldiers carried no tent, and the tepee was not needed in the warm weather with no indication of rain.

Joe built a fire of the driest sticks the boys could find, made a big kettleful of coffee, fried a panful of bacon, set out the last of the smoked goose-breast and even produced a small bag of raisins, which he had kept carefully concealed for a very special feast.

As soon as Joe had finished cooking he put the fire out, for Indians have both sharp eyes and keen noses for smoke.

The boys could hardly await the moment

when the soldiers were through eating. It seemed as if they could eat almost as much as an Indian. "Golly," remarked Don, as the two boys went to free a horse who had tangled himself in the rope, "the big blond Sergeant, I bet, could eat a whole guacalote."

After dinner the men lay down behind some rocks from which they could see the horses and also keep a lookout for Indians.

"Believe me, men," Sergeant Hart began, "there will be some fighting this summer, if we can bring them to bay, and I think this time we shall corner them somewhere.

"You see, our command from Fort Ellis, near Bozeman, has been on the trail ever since March. We have been patrolling the Yellowstone. Our job was to keep them from crossing to this side, the north side of the river, and I think we did it. Of course, you'll find a few roamers everywhere; Lord knows where they belong and where they come from; but we kept the big camps south of the Yellowstone, so they can't strike out for Canada and get away."

"How large is General Gibbon's command?" asked Joe.

"About 450 men; and we have marched about three hundred miles, since we left Fort Ellis. We are to join Generals Terry and Custer, who are coming from Fort Lincoln with about 1,000 men, near the mouth of Powder River.

"General Terry will be commander-in-chief, but Custer will command his famous Seventh Cavalry."

"Why doesn't Custer command the expedition?" asked Joe. "He knows Indians and he is a daring fighter."

"Maybe he is too daring," rejoined Hart. "Anyhow, he is not in command. He got into a row with Secretary of War Belknap, and President Grant would not have let him join his regiment at all if Sheridan and Terry had not asked for him. I don't know what it is all about. I am just telling you what is being told in our camp."

"I was with Custer on the Washita," Joe put in. "And Pete here was in Powell's fight at Fort Phil Kearney."

"The devil you say?" exclaimed Hart, "and we thought you four were a bunch of greenhorns after we got over our Indian scare.

"Do you know that a good many officers think that you were lucky in getting away from the Washita alive?"

"I know it," admitted Joe. "Some of us were pretty well scared when we learned that Black Kettle's camp was only one of a string of big camps of all the southern Plains Indians. If they had attacked us on our thirty-mile march to our supply-wagons, none of us might have lived to tell about it. I do not know what Custer thought of our position, but I have always felt that we ran a big bluff on those southern Indians."

"I'd be sorry for the officer and his troops," Pete joined the talk, "who tried a game of bluff on the Sioux. They have been fighting ever since they were driven out of Minnesota, and they will do some more desperate fighting before they give up their last buffalo country.

"We learned to know the Sioux at Fort

Phil Kearney. You cannot work a complete surprise on a big Indian camp in summer, and unless you whip them and also destroy their camp, they are not defeated."

The two soldiers replied that the men in their command expected some hard fighting, if they ever could get the Indians to make a stand.

Sergeant Hart then explained the plan of the campaign as far as he understood it.

Terry, Custer, and Gibbon were to operate from the north, with the Yellowstone as a kind of base and northern line. A steamboat, the *Far West,* was to come up the Yellowstone under government charter. This boat would be under the orders of General Terry, and would carry troops and provisions, ferry men and horses across the river, serve as headquarters for the General and his staff; or, in case of emergency, serve as a hospital for sick and wounded men.

Captain Grant Marsh, who knew the river well and was also a bold and skilful pilot, commanded her. She was about 200 feet long, could carry 400 tons of freight and

about thirty passengers, and when loaded would draw about four feet of water. She was a very manageable boat on a swift river like the Yellowstone. In June, when all the rivers heading in the mountains were high, she might even be able to go up on the larger tributaries on the south side of the Yellowstone, such as the Powder and the Big Horn.

"Boys, that sounds plumb good to me," commented Joe. "Custer knows the Yellowstone country as far as the mouth of the Big Horn. He was here in '73. If he is half as lucky as he was on the Washita, he ought to, before the summer is over, round up all the big Sioux chiefs, Crazy Horse, Gall, Two Moon, Sitting Bull, and all the rest of them. But go on, Sergeant, tell us more about the plan of the campaign. What about Crook?"

"General Crook," the Sergeant continued, "is to press them from the south, from Fort Fetterman, on the Platte. He has a force of about 1,500 men."

Terry and Custer, the soldiers told, were

expected to march from Fort Lincoln about this time; the middle of May.

"But where are the Indians?" Hank asked.

"There's the rub," replied Private Lester. "We don't know. Nobody seems to know, except that they are somewhere between the Platte and the Yellowstone, probably on the Powder, the Tongue, the Rosebud, and the Big Horn."

"Lester, you are forgetting that Crook found the Indians," Sergeant Hart interrupted.

"No, I'm coming to that," said the private. "Crook surprised the camp of Crazy Horse in March, during cold weather. He burnt their camp, but it turned out that he had found too many Indians. They all got away, and even recaptured their pony herd and harassed the soldiers all the way back to Fort Fetterman."

"That is bad news," Pete claimed. "The Indians, I am sure, think they have beaten Crook, and they will become bolder than ever.

"That's rotten bad news! Why didn't Crook kill the ponies as Custer did? The Sioux will never go on any reservation till they have been whipped and whipped hard.

"Too bad that the winter was so severe that nothing could be done. If the troops were ready to strike now, they would stand a much better chance, because the ponies are still poor and weak.

"Believe me, boys, you are going to see some fighting this summer. Sergeant, when do you think Terry and Crook will be ready to strike?"

"Not till the middle of June, maybe later," replied Sergeant Hart.

Talking further with the soldiers, Joe and Pete learned that Crook had about two hundred Crow Indians with him, and that Gibbon also had about twenty Crow scouts and a number of Rees.

"The Crows are first-class scouts and trailers," Joe admitted, "and also good fighters. But the Rees are apt to run and demoralize the soldiers if a troop find themselves in a tight place. Our Osage scouts

before the battle on the Washita had all planned to leave us, if the fight went against us."

The Crows, or Absarokas, as they called themselves, were bitter enemies of the Sioux, who had driven them out of their best hunting-grounds, the country of the Big Horn.

Both Hart and Lester knew the Crow scouts in Gibbon's command, and did not regard them highly as fighters. They were very valuable allies because they knew the country south of the Yellowstone, of which none of the officers and soldiers had an intimate knowledge.

One story the two soldiers told was of special interest to Joe and the boys because it related to an experience with the Indians on the part of a number of men from Bozeman; and it showed clearly the temper of the Sioux.

These men in the fall of '75 had started to explore and prospect for gold in the valley of the Big Horn, and to select a site for a steamboat-landing, from which goods could be hauled by wagon to Bozeman.

They were at once beset by the Sioux and had to build a rude fort, which they called Fort Pease, after their leader.

Almost daily the Sioux fired into the stockade, and by midwinter six of the men had been killed and nine severely wounded, leaving only twenty-five fit for work and fighting.

The Sioux, on the other hand, seemed to grow more numerous every day, and the besieged men began to realize that, unless help came, there could be only one end to Fort Pease.

A brave man volunteered to travel to Fort Ellis by night and bring help. After many anxious weeks, when the holders of the fort began to fear that their messenger had never reached Fort Ellis, a troop of cavalry was seen riding down the valley of the Yellowstone; and the worn-out defenders of Fort Pease were relieved.

"Was Thomas Stamford one of the men at Fort Pease?" asked Joe. "He is the father of my boys here, and we have no news from him since we left Fort Totten."

CHAPTER XXVIII

SHARP EYES

THE two soldiers did not know the names of any of the men who had been in the Fort Pease venture; but Pete and Joe realized that this incident could only have angered the Sioux and made them more confident in their ability to hold their own against the whites.

After supper, just before sunset, Pete discovered three horsemen crossing a sage-brush flat and going toward the river.

"They are Indians," Joe decided. "I can tell by the humped and limp way they sit their horses. They have not seen us, and I think they are going to cross the river after dark."

The boys were eager to know where they came from.

"Who can tell?" Pete remarked with

a gesture indicating anywhere, nowhere, everywhere. "I have seen Indians jump out of the ground, and I have sometimes thought they had dropped out of the clouds. These three men, I could see, were tired and their horses were tired. They may have come from Fort Peck, from Devil's Lake or Manitoba. Or they may just have spent a few days in the hills north of the river."

As soon as it was dark, the six men quietly saddled their horses and rode back into the hills for a mile. The three Indians had just reminded them of the dangerous character of the country, if any of them had need of such a reminder. Had the Indians come half a mile farther north, they would certainly have discovered the horses of the campers.

The stories which the men told in the dark, while they were all sitting under some scrubby trees, added to the sense of danger, which had taken possession of the boys during the day and evening, and for the first time since they had left Fort Totten, they awoke several times during the night, when-

ever a horse snorted or a coyote uttered his piercing howl close to camp.

The days of happy security which they had enjoyed in the Bad Lands were past, and they realized that there was a long, dangerous journey ahead of them.

At last the meadow-larks began to sing, and the sun rose over the rough country east of the Yellowstone, whose fringes of cottonwoods and willows began to show the delicate green of spring.

None of the men had taken their clothes off for the night, and the soldiers said they did not expect to undress till they were safe inside the palisade of Fort Buford.

Before the soldiers left, they warned their new friends to travel with extreme caution, or they would never reach Bozeman.

"If travelling at night was not so slow and tiring to both men and horses," urged Sergeant Hart, "I would say you should not travel at all during daylight."

Joe rode with the soldiers for a mile. "If Pete and I were here alone, we should strike out for Gibbon's camp and join in this cam-

paign, but I cannot expose my boys to the dangers of a regular Indian war. From what I learned at Bismarck and Fort Totten, and from what you have told us, I fear there is a big storm brewing.

"Good-bye, men! Perhaps we shall meet again after it is all over. Take care of yourselves. Good-bye." And Joe, absorbed in thought, rode slowly back to his companions.

Pete was sitting alone at the camping place, the boys having gone to water the horses at a small stream.

"What do you say, Pete," he asked, "should we go ahead with our plans, or had we better strike out for Gibbon's camp and take our chances with the soldiers? Things look a little worse than I had expected."

"If we join the soldiers," Pete replied after a little, "we can't leave them again; for the Indians are always hanging around the troops, trying to pick off some careless straggler, to steal horses, and to watch the movement of the troops. If we join them, we have to stay with them through the campaign. I should, for myself, like nothing

better. If the Sioux get me, there is not much lost. But it would not be the safest way of taking the boys through, and that's our job, Joe. Isn't it?

"Wall, then, I say we stick to our plan. It seems to me we ought to feel our way along cautiously in the divide region between the Yellowstone and the Missouri. At this time of the year, water and grass can be found everywhere. There are patches of Bad Lands in that country, where we can hide a day or two; and if we have to, we can go by the owl road, at night. That's the way it looks to me."

"All right, Pete," said Joe, "I agree. If you will stay with the lads now, I shall do a little scouting from the rise west of us."

In an hour Joe returned and reported that he could see no sign of Indians in any direction, and it was decided to saddle up.

They made ten miles that day, but struck one trail of Indians leading toward the river and one leading away from it. There had been four or five men in each party and neither trail was more than a day old.

In the afternoon they found a secluded spot near Three Buttes and decided to remain there for the night, but they considered the country too dangerous to build even a small fire.

Joe climbed the highest of the buttes, and spent an hour scouting in every direction, but could discover no signs of any Indian camp.

If there were any Sioux in the neighborhood, and both Joe and Pete feared that there were, they also had made camp without building a fire; probably they were afraid of straggling parties of Crows or Blackfeet.

One thing Joe and Pete did at this camp to lessen the danger of being trailed. They took the shoes off all their horses.

"We should have done that," said Pete, "before we crossed the Yellowstone. Every Indian that strikes a trail of shod horses knows at once that it was made by white men."

All the shoes and even the parings from the hoofs of the ponies Pete buried carefully in a dry run.

" Why do you bury all that so carefully? " asked Don.

" Because," Pete explained, " if an Indian discovered that we had trimmed the hoofs of the ponies, he would know at once that he was on the trail of white men. But now, even if he does discover that the ponies came into camp shod and left unshod, he might think that some Indians had taken the shoes off some stolen horses. Leave a few scraps of dried buffalo meat at the camp-site, but be sure not to leave any scraps of bacon."

Joe had been very careful not to expose himself against the sky-line on top of the butte. He had not once stood up erect, but had done all his scouting in the Indian way, by lying flat on his stomach.

He reported that about five miles to the southwest, in the direction they were going, there was a small lake, which would make a fine camping-place.

" Yes, and a fine place for running into Indians," Pete held. " That's the very place where we are likely to find our friends of the last trail.

"Joe, we have to pass that lake at night. I am glad you saw it, and you must lead us well to the south or north of it. We might as well get used to travelling with owls and bats, although I dislike it very much. It is slow work and very hard on both men and horses, especially in a country where one is not well acquainted."

When it was dark, the travellers started, Joe taking the lead and setting his course by some stars in the west and a small butte in line with the lake.

"No talking, boys," Pete warned. "The sage-brush may have ears."

Don and Hank had never thought that travelling at night through a dangerous country could be so uncanny. On the plains out of Bismarck, they had not expected to meet Indians, but now they felt as if a Sioux might rise out of any clump of sage-brush or from behind any rock. Pete need not have told them not to talk; they were almost afraid to breathe.

Several times Joe stopped to look and listen into the darkness ahead.

"Don't swing too far west," Pete whispered. "Those stars are moving."

"I am allowing for that," Joe replied. "Do you hear a dog barking? I thought I did."

Neither Pete nor the boys could hear any sounds but those that came from coyotes and gray wolves, and again the line moved forward in silence.

It seemed to the lads that they had gone twenty miles, when Joe halted again and said that to the best of his knowledge they had passed the lake and were now headed up a small valley southwest of the lake. "It is only about midnight," he concluded, "and we might as well go on for a while."

For about an hour they wound their way slowly through patches of sage-brush and over open ground. Then the valley grew much narrower and seemed to turn directly south.

"I think," Joe advised, "we had better stop here till we can see where we are. The country right ahead of us is too rough

for night travel. Roll in, boys," he added, " and go to sleep. Pete and I will watch till daylight."

Hank soon fell asleep, but Don was so wide awake that he soon arose and sat down with the men.

" How do you know," he asked, " that there aren't Indians camping right ahead of us? I think I heard a noise there."

" Wall, son," Pete tried to quiet him, " we don't exactly know it, but it is not a likely camping-place. There is no water and no wood. You had better roll in again and go to sleep."

But Don's nerves had become unstrung by the constant strain of his first experience in night travel through a really dangerous country. He was soon back and asked rather timidly:

" May I sit with you? I can't sleep."

Pete and Joe had both been half asleep and did not answer at once.

" Please, Joe, may I sit with you? " Don repeated.

" Sure, son! Sit right down on my

blanket. You will have plenty of time to sleep during the day."

"Joe, may I ask you something?" requested Don.

"Sure, son, fire away," Pete answered, not giving Joe time to reply.

"Aren't you and Joe the least bit afraid and worried? I think I am too scared to sleep."

"Wall, son," Pete began in his fatherly drawl, "I reckon, when Joe and I was kids, we would have been scared, too, in this here nook in the hills. You'll get over that. You ought to see some of the soldiers scared in their first fight.

"But a soldier soon forgets to worry or be scared. If Joe and I get through this country, you and Hank will get through."

"Oh, I am not scared that way. Only I can't sleep," repeated Don. "May I go and punch Hank? Why should he sleep, when the rest of us are awake?"

Pete and Joe laughed, but thought he had better not awake Hank that way, for Hank might let out a yell.

"I wish I could punch him. He punched me in the Bad Lands and yelled Indians, too."

"You can punch him after he is awake," said Pete, "but not just now."

"He is too big when he is awake," Don came back.

"Wall, let him sleep. We shall not travel many nights before you can also lie down and go to sleep, whenever we make a stop," said Pete.

At last it grew light enough, so that one could see his way, and Pete asked Don to come with him to a high point a little way off, from which they could look over the country.

Pete was no longer a young man, but when it came to climbing hills, Don could not keep up with him.

Pete took plenty of time to look the country over in all directions.

"Don't stand up, son," he said after a while, "but run your eyes close along the east shore of the lake we passed last night, and tell me what you see."

"I see nothing but water and rocks and trees," reported Don after he had looked up and down the shore several times. "Do you see anything?" he asked.

"Yes, I see an Indian camp."

"You do?" cried Don, looking at Pete's face to make sure that Pete was not joking.

"Yes, I do," repeated Pete. "It is a small hunting-camp of four or five men."

"Do you see their tepee?"

"I think I do," the old man assured the boy.

"I give it up. I guess I was not meant for a scout. I don't see a thing."

"Look again," Pete encouraged the boy. "Do the clumps of trees all look alike?"

"They do to me," the boy said, rather dejected.

"No, they don't. The large one near the middle of the lake looks more bluish than the others. That's smoke from a small fire. It sort of hangs in the trees; I mean the smoke does.

"Among the trees I see a large brownish

spot. That's the tepee. The top is hidden by tall bushes and branches."

"Oh, I see the smoke now," exclaimed Don, "but I can't make out any tepee."

"Wall, let us return to camp. We must move before breakfast."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LOST TREASURE

"Don't start a fire, Joe," called Pete, when he saw Hank gathering sticks of sage-brush and buffalo chips. "We must saddle up and make for the rough country to our right. Spread out as much as possible and avoid travelling single file. There is a Sioux hunting-camp east of the lake."

"Don't you want to go and look at the camp?" asked Don.

"No," said Joe. "If Pete has seen it I don't need to see it."

In about an hour, they halted in a box-canyon near a spring. Joe built a small fire to make tea, but extinguished the fire as soon as he had the water boiling.

"Hank," requested Joe after breakfast, "you go and lie down under the sage-brush near the point of that cliff and keep a sharp

lookout, especially on our back trail. If you see anything suspicious come down and call us, but don't yell, and don't you stand up on the cliff.

"The horses cannot get out of this canyon, just let them go as they please. We will dig a pool for them below the spring, and then Pete and Don and I shall roll in for a nap till noon."

"Joe, this country looks almost like the Bad Lands," Don said while he helped Joe at digging the pool.

"It is a piece of Bad Lands," affirmed Joe. "You find them scattered all through the dry western plains. They are good places to hide in. The Indians are not apt to find us here, unless they should happen to cross our trail while it is still fresh."

"How can you tell how old a trail is?" asked the boy.

"On a fresh trail," Joe explained, "every bit of soil around a track stands up sharp. Then gradually the sand crumbles away on the sharp edges. If the campers have left bones or scraps of food, you can easily tell

whether those are fresh or several days or weeks old, and the same is true of all other signs you find on a trail or camp-site. For instance, if you find a camp-fire still smoldering, you know that the campers are not far ahead of you. On the Washita campaign, one of our scouts smelled the smoke of a deserted camp-fire, and that was the first indication that we were getting close to Black Kettle's camp. In a hostile country, Indians always try to leave as little of a trail as possible."

About noon Pete and Don relieved Hank, while Joe and Hank went on foot to scout southwest of the camp in the direction they expected to travel. Hank said he was not sleepy and would rather go scouting with Joe than remain in camp.

After about two hours, Joe and Hank returned and the news they brought was of the kind that would have frightened men less brave and experienced than Joe and Pete.

There was another small Indian camp about five miles west of their own box-can-

yon camp. Joe had seen smoke and felt sure that he had made out through his glass several ponies close to the smoke, but he had not seen a tepee.

To Hank, the whole country had just looked like a wilderness of sage-brush, rocks and clumps of bushes and small trees. He had not been able to see either smoke or ponies.

Hank and Don were much excited and did not even have any appetite for supper, but Joe and Pete ate a hearty meal as usual, and did not seem in the least disturbed about their Indian neighbors.

"Indians never worried me, if I saw the varmints first," remarked Pete while he cut off another piece of dried meat.

"Eat a good meal," Joe encouraged the boys. "We have plenty of time, for we shall not travel to-night. It is going to rain, and night travel is bad enough in good weather."

After supper, Joe and Pete cut some poles, set up the tepee and put the camp in shape for a storm.

The boys threw some brush of buffalo-

bushes across the narrowest place of the canyon, so that the ponies could not wander away during the night.

"Make a good fence," Joe had told them. "A horse is a wise creature in many ways. He never gets lost and can always find his way back to camp. But in other ways he is the biggest fool that ever walked on four legs. He will shy a thousand times at things that he knows are perfectly harmless, and he always wants to go back where he came from. When the storm breaks, these beasts might think that there is better shelter in the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri than in the Bad Lands of the Yellowstone."

The storm did break just before dark with a high wind, a driving cold rain, and a pelting shower of hail.

In hundreds of spouts the water fell into the canyon, and in ten minutes the dry run near the tepee was a gurgling, rushing torrent.

The boys sat with awed faces near the little fire in the tepee as the thunder crashed

among the cliffs and rolled and rumbled far away to the east.

But Pete smoked his old black pipe with calm contentment. "That's a fine storm," he drawled after a long silence, "just the kind I like. It used to come down like that on the Little Piney."

"Does the lightning ever strike a tepee?" asked Don, frightened at the wild uproar of the first bad thunderstorm on the plain.

"I never heard of it," answered Pete. "It would be more likely to strike the cliffs, the tall cottonwoods, or the old cedars on the cliffs. I have known of them being struck, but a tepee among the low bushy cedars in a canyon is quite safe.

"Do you realize, boys, that this is good weather for us? Thar won't no Indians trail us into this box-canyon after a storm like this. Our tracks are wiped out dead. Thank the Good Lord for this fine storm."

"We can all sleep safely to-night," Joe added. "This storm is more protection to us than a company of soldiers. So don't worry, boys. We are warm and dry in our

tepee, if it rains all night. When we get ready, we shall travel again."

In the morning the boys were surprised to find the horse pool washed away, and the spring running milky with a fine white mud.

Joe and Pete decided that they had better remain a few days in the canyon. During that time the hunting parties east and west of them might move away.

"The soft ground," Joe explained, "is bad for us to travel over. If we wait a few days, till the ground again becomes dry and hard, our horses will leave less of a trail. You boys get busy hunting rabbits and sage-hens with your bows and arrows, for our dried meat and other provisions are going pretty fast."

When the boys were about to start on their hunt, Hank came running back to the tepee with the greatest anxiety shown on his face.

"What is the trouble?" asked Joe as he reached for his rifle. "Have the Indians discovered us?"

"No," cried Hank, "we have not seen

any Indians, but my box is gone. My tin box with the greenbacks for Father is gone. I put it under a rock near the dry creek last night, and now it's gone."

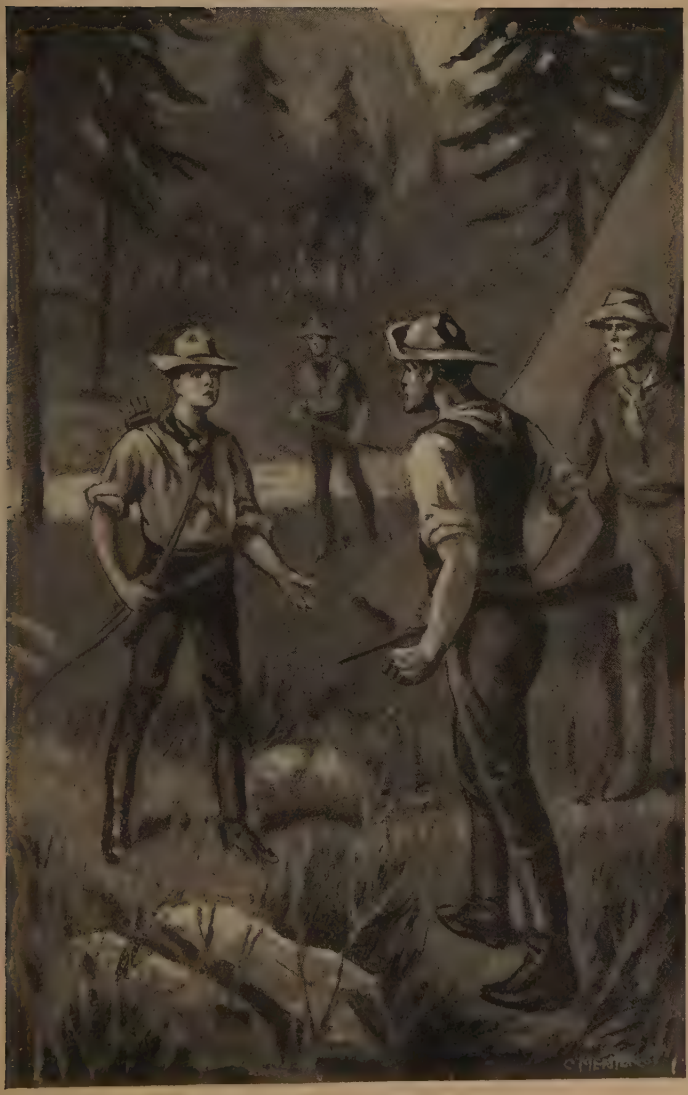
Here was indeed a serious misfortune. Joe had advised Hank not to keep the box in the tepee, but to hide it a rod or two away from the camp.

"Our camp might be plundered by Indians in our absence," Joe had told the boys, "but no Indian would find a small box hidden somewhere under a rock."

The box had been kept under a rock in the Bad Lands all winter, but on the previous night Hank had hidden the box near the dry run, and the water had risen and swept it away.

All four of the campers searched the bed of the run, which was now dry again. They dug up every patch of freshly deposited mud, they looked in every place where the flood had run over the bank, but the box remained lost.

"Pete, we have to find that box if it takes all summer. I can't say to Stamford, 'Here



"My tin box with the greenbacks for Father is gone!"
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are your boys, but we lost the $10,000, most of your business capital.' "

Finding a treasure-box was new business to Pete.

" I have done a little mining for gold," said Pete, " but I can't figure out any way of finding a tin box, except just to hunt for it till we find it. You don't suppose it has gone clear down to the Yellowstone? "

" If it has," Joe replied dejectedly, " it is gone. And I can never repay $10,000."

" You wouldn't have to repay it," argued Hank. " It is not your fault that I lost it. I should not have put it so near the run, and I should have thought of it when it began to rain."

" All the same," maintained Joe, " I am responsible to your father, and we have to find that box, no matter how long it takes us."

Next morning the sky was clear and the birds were singing cheerfully, but the four campers were far from being cheerful.

Breakfast was eaten almost in silence, and after the meal Joe sat in front of the

tepee and smoked like an old Indian chief planning revenge on his enemies.

"Look here, men," he broke the silence, "this wild digging everywhere is of no use. It is fifty miles along this creek bed to the Yellowstone. If we fuss around the way we did yesterday, it will take us all summer to search this creek bed. We have to find a better plan. Sit down here, all of you, and do a bit of thinking."

"Would that box float or sink in water?" asked Pete.

"It almost floated," answered Hank. "I tried it in the Little Missouri, and it kind of hung in the water like wood that is not dry."

"I think I have it," said Pete with some spirit. "If that fool box floats and is air-tight, then it can't be buried in mud. It must be hung up in some driftwood, or the current must have swept it out of the bed and left it stranded on the bank or hung up in some brush or rubbish."

"I know it is air-tight," declared Hank; "I looked it over many times and the tinner was told to solder it up air-tight. Uncle

Reuben and I stood by and saw him do it."

The treasure-hunters now did no more digging, but Pete and Joe searched carefully along the creek bed, and went through every pile of driftwood and rubbish, while Don and Hank lay on some high points and kept a sharp lookout for Indians.

"What would we do if the Indians catch us at this place?" asked Don one evening after they had been searching in vain for several days.

"We would make it awfully hot for them," declared Pete savagely. "I am not in a pleasant mood for visitors. If they know what's good for their health they will keep away from these diggings.

"Anyhow, I am not afraid of Indians we see first. It is those that we don't see that I am scared of. If you fellows let any Indian sneak up on us while Joe and I are hunting that blarney box of yours, I'll use a good sage-brush switch on you. So don't you go to sleep on picket duty!"

When Joe and Pete were again at work

next day, Pete said he didn't really mind hunting for that box, as long as they all had plenty of time, but he was getting a little afraid some Indians might cross the creek and surprise them.

"You don't think," he asked, "that blooming box could have sailed clear down to the river?"

Joe did not think this at all probable. "No wood or rubbish," he felt sure, "travels very far on one flood in a run like this. It is sure to be stranded or hung up."

On Saturday the men came to a place where the creek bed spread out flat over some layers of rock, and there Pete kicked with his foot against a small object covered with dry grass and sticks.

"Look here, Joe!" he called. "Is that Hank's tarnation box? I never saw the blooming thing, you know."

"Hurrah!" shouted Joe, forgetting where he was. "Pete, I feel like kissing you. That's the treasure-box! Pete, you don't know how glad I am that we found it!"

"Wall, I reckon," Pete remarked, "we

ought to hold a Thanksgiving Service to-morrow. Let us call the boys. They will do some dancing when they see their rusty old box."

CHAPTER XXX

TOO MANY TRAILS

THE happy campers decided not to travel on Sunday, but in the afternoon they did a little scouting, and found that their neighbors on the east had left, while those on the west were still there.

"I declare," reported Pete, "those fellows west of us must be camping near a fine spring or water-hole. I have a suspicion they are Crows; I don't believe any Sioux would stay so long in one place in this country. Their large camps are all south of the Yellowstone. They must know that a big campaign is planned against them, and they would not be in a mood to remain long in a pleasant, quiet hunting-camp, as I know Indian nature. I have a good mind to go and find out whether they are Sioux or Crows."

"You will do no such thing," Joe told

him. "The Crows may be very friendly to the whites, but we travel much more safely alone than in company with Indians."

Both Pete and Joe disliked night travel very much. "It really is not travelling," they agreed. "You sort of grope your way along. If you come to an impassable canyon or cliff you can't tell which way to turn, and when you make camp, you don't know till daylight whether you have stopped in a safe place or in a dangerous one, unless you know the country so well that you can pick your route in spite of the darkness or the deceptive light of the moon."

Neither Joe nor Pete was well acquainted with this country. They knew that they had to keep a general southwesterly direction. They wished to keep from ten to twenty miles north of the Yellowstone, but they did not wish to leave the land of the rivers and creeks that drain to the Yellowstone.

Joe's map had been drawn by a soldier at Fort Totten, who had not claimed that it was accurate in detail. It showed only the

general direction of the Yellowstone, the Missouri and the Musselshell, a large tributary of the Missouri.

After a Sunday of rest they started, as near as they could tell, for the big bend of the Musselshell. As they would pass, at least, three miles south of the Indian camp at the spring, they decided to risk travelling in daytime.

"Any Sioux in this country wouldn't be looking for white men so far from the Yellowstone," Joe reasoned; "so we ought to be able to slip through, if we scout ahead carefully and not try to go fast."

They had covered less than ten miles when they struck a trail of five ponies going north.

"Hang the luck!" muttered Pete. "What does it mean, Joe?"

Joe examined the tracks silently, but Don ventured to suggest wild ponies.

Pete looked at Don, as if the lad had uttered some schoolboy foolishness.

"Hide in the buffalo-bushes," he said, "till I find out."

In half an hour he returned, and his open, manly face showed that he had discovered something he did not like.

"The ponies," he reported, "may have been too wild for some boys to ride, but each one carried an Indian on his back. They passed here an hour ago. Too bad, Joe," he added with a grim humor, "you didn't get us off a little earlier so we could have said 'How!' to the gentlemen."

"It pains me very much, Pete," Joe replied in the same vein, "to hear that we missed by so little any of your dear old friends. Perhaps we had better follow them.

"Whenever you see an Indian trail, you get sort of mad, just like Custer. You should have gone with him on this campaign."

"Oh, close up, you old clam!" retorted Pete. "If they had ever kept you sweating in a wagon-box for a whole day, you would get mad, too, when you found a Sioux trail."

"How do you know that it is a Sioux trail?" Hank made bold to ask.

"I don't know it," Pete snapped. "I

just reckon it is. A bunch of young bucks, I reckon, who have gone after the Crow camp at the spring.

"If you fellows don't quit worrying me I shall desert you and join Custer. I do hope Custer will be as lucky with Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse as he was with Black Kettle. That battle on the Washita wasn't anything to brag of. You just caught them napping."

"Did I ever brag of it?" Joe replied quickly. "I always said I didn't like that kind of Indian fighting."

"That's the only kind that hurts them and brings them to terms. Chasing painted bucks around over the plains doesn't accomplish anything. They enjoy that and laugh at the soldiers and the whole government."

"I agree with you," Joe said good-naturedly. "Now load your pipe and let us travel."

"It is loaded," Pete laughed. "Spread out, while we cross this trail, and cut over on hard ground."

About two hours later, Pete, who was

scouting ahead of the party, came to another trail leading south.

"Go back and lay up in that scrub we have just passed," he ordered, after he had turned and met his friends. "I have struck another trail of the painted devils. And don't stake the horses out. We have to hide them in the brush till dark. I am going back to do a little scouting along that trail."

CHAPTER XXXI

TALK OR SHOOT?

PETE stayed away so long that the boys began to fear he had fallen into the hands of the Indians whose trail he had gone to follow. But Joe assured the boys that old Pete scouting on foot would never be seen first by Indians on horseback.

However, the lads were much worried till Pete returned to camp an hour before dark.

He had followed the trail for more than three miles, he told his friends, and while he had learned a good deal about the party who made it, several points concerning their trail were a mystery to him.

Only four men had made this trail, and they were not the same Indians who made the trail they had found first. Pete had learned this from the tracks of the ponies

and also from the fact that this trail was at least a day old.

"Were they Sioux or Crows?" Joe was anxious to know.

Pete said they were Sioux, and showed a discarded moccasin, which he had picked up at their deserted camp.

On what errand this party was travelling, Pete had not been able to learn. They knew that they were travelling in a country where their sworn enemies, the Crows, might fall upon them; for they had built no fire at their sleeping-place, which was well hidden, and they had allowed their horses very little rope. It seemed to Pete that they were on a horse-stealing expedition, and they would, of course, be very eager to secure a few Crow or white scalps, if luck favored them.

"But here is one point that puzzles me," Pete wound up his story. "The part of the trail which we hit is a part of a big loop. The trail runs south a mile, then west about a mile, and then shoots off almost straight north, just a little west of north.

"They slept at the point where the trail

turns north, and one of the party was a mere boy, not bigger than Hank."

"How can you know that, Pete," Don asked eagerly, "when you never saw them? Or did you see them?"

"Didn't I tell you the trail was a day old?" Pete came back with a mild rebuke. "It is easy enough to tell what men did on a trail, but to tell the reason why they did it, what was in their mind;—that is not so easy.

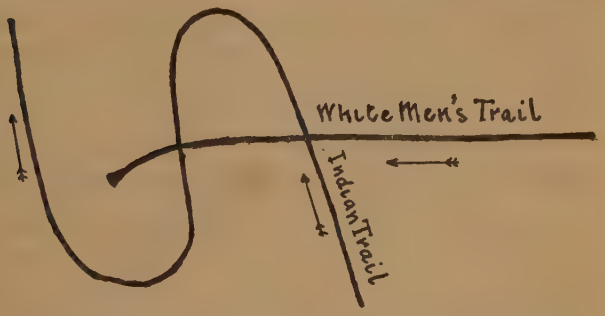
"It was not difficult to tell a boy's bed from a man's bed. But why did they make this loop in their trail?

"Here is my guess: I know that one of the party was a boy. Two of them were young men, friends of the boy. The leader, an older man, intended to return to the Yellowstone; but during the evening, the boy and youths persuaded him to go a little farther into the dangerous country."

"Do you mean to tell us," asked Joe, who had been listening intently, "that we struck their trail twice and did not see it the first time?"

"That is exactly what I do mean to tell

you. Here is their trail, and here is ours." And Pete traced the trails on the ground:



"Well, I'll be dinged!" muttered Joe. "Then they are now north of us, and we shall either cross their trail again, or they will cross ours, if they ever return to the Yellowstone."

"You have said it, Joe!" Pete called out, slapping his knee. "For the next fifty miles we have to be on the watch for that bunch of thieves and cutthroats, until we find their trail going south."

"How do you know they are thieves and cutthroats?" Don was going to ask, but he caught himself in time, and tried to answer his own question.

"Let us have a meal of that tender Little

Missouri mutton," Pete requested after a time. " We had better not build a fire," he added. " It would be careless to sleep near a fireplace to-night, and there is no other safe camping-place in sight."

Men and horses were allowed to rest in this camp only till about midnight, when the train moved until there was daylight enough to select a camp where there was water and good grass for the horses.

From now on they proceeded by slow laborious stages of night travel till they reached a river of considerable size, the first they had touched since they had left the Yellowstone.

The river seemed to come from the west, but made a big bend to the north some ten or twelve miles south of the point where the travellers had struck it. From a description, which a soldier at Fort Totten had given them, Joe and Pete agreed that it must be the Musselshell, which runs into the Missouri.

The Yellowstone receives no tributary of any size from the north, and both the two

men, as well as the boys, were glad to make camp once more on a stream with green trees and fine grass; for the somber gray of the sage-brush had begun to weary the travellers. Of trees they had seen nothing but a stunted growth since they had crossed the Yellowstone, and the foliage of some of the larger bushes was of the same silver-gray as that of the sage-brush.

The fine hairs which cause this grayish color protect the plant against too much sunlight and evaporation, but the trees and shrubs so protected do not make cheerful landscape of rich green trees and shrubs like those in eastern North America and Western Europe. They paint the grayish and subdued foliage of our arid West and of the Mediterranean countries in Europe. The farther west one travels from the Mississippi the more small plants and shrubs he finds, the foliage of which is coated with gray silver, and which, for that reason, stand out in strong contrast to their green neighbors. On the dry western plains, even the grass has a grayish tint, very different from the

rich green pastures and meadows we enjoy in New England, Kentucky, or Minnesota.

When Pete and Joe reached the Musselshell, the foliage was at its best. Every leaf looked fresh and delicate, as if some nymph had specially cleaned and burnished it. Western rivers run like wreaths of beauty through the treeless grassy plains and the great stretches of sage-brush and dull brown hills.

It was now the middle of June, the time when nature everywhere in the north, but most strikingly on western rivers, has donned her bridal garb. The wild roses, next to the goldenrod and the sunflowers, the most abundant beautiful wild flowers of North America, were in bloom, and the birds were still in full song.

Although the two white Indians, as Joe sometimes called the boys, were by no means blind or deaf to the appeal of birds and flowers, a river makes its own peculiar appeal to every boy. The water was still a little cool, but that did not matter to Don and Hank, who had not enjoyed a real swim

since they left Minnewaukan, the large Spirit Lake of the Dakotas.

Then the fishing-tackle was found, and boundless was the joy when they brought a string of catfish or bullheads to camp. If Joe had not strictly forbidden all yells, the lads would have given a shout every time they pulled out a fish.

Hank noticed that Pete and Joe did not take a swim together, but while one was in the river the other seemed to be puttering around camp.

During the week of night travel they had not once built a fire.

This rigid precaution had been forced upon them by many signs of danger, which they had discovered during the first part of the week. Not only did they find several trails and camp-sites, but twice they saw a small party of Indians pass through the country, one of them coming within a mile of their camp. Whether these Indians were Sioux or Crows, they had no means of finding out. They seemed to be headed for the Big Horn, and Pete was of the opinion that

they were Sioux who intended to join one of the big camps of their people south of the Yellowstone.

During the last three days, however, no Indians or signs of Indians had been discovered, and Joe thought it would be safe to rest a few days on the Musselshell. At this place Pete again built fires for cooking small game and fish, but he always lit the fire after dark in an enclosure of skins and robes.

"They can't see the smoke at night," explained Pete, "and the skins will keep the light from showing at any distance."

Not only in the matter of fires, but in everything else were the two men extremely cautious. The horses were always picketed, and either one of the men or the two boys were on guard.

When they left the camp on the Musselshell they travelled straight south, and reached the big bend of the river in the evening after a day's journey of some twenty miles. Here they made camp in a small grove, surrounded by bushes of buffaloberry and other small shrubs.

Next morning, when they were about ready to travel, Pete, who had been looking over the country from a high place, came running back to camp.

"Hide the horses behind the brush," he spoke hurriedly. "We can't leave. Eight or ten Indians are coming right down on us. Everybody get ready for a fight!

"We must muzzle the horses, so they can't make a noise!"

In half an hour the Indians stopped in another grove only a few hundred yards away, but it was evident that they had no idea of the presence of the party of whites; for they picketed their horses, and sat down to eat, but they built no fire.

"If any of them leave the grove they will surely discover our horses," declared Joe, "for that brush is too small to make a good hiding-place. Come, Pete, let us throw the horses and keep them lying down. If we don't, we shall be discovered."

Don and Hank were surprised to see how quickly the two men threw each horse and

tied his legs in such a way that he had to lie flat on his side.

"It is hard luck for the poor beasts," whispered Joe, "but we had to do it. Keep your knives handy. We may want to cut them loose in a hurry."

That was a long, anxious day. All talking was done in a whisper and no man could leave the grove all day.

Fortunately the Indians had no dogs with them, and the men of the party seemed to be tired and lay down to sleep.

"Couldn't we slip away while they are asleep?" asked Hank.

"We could do so on foot," Joe thought, "but not on horseback. The stamping of the horses would wake them up; and I can't think of leaving the poor beasts tied up to starve."

"No, we can't do that," the boys agreed; "we won't abandon the horses that carried us all the way from Fort Totten. We'll fight before we do that."

"Then we have to stay here till evening," decided Joe. "They will leave before dark,

I think, and they may not discover us. We could make a strong defense in this place, but if they catch us travelling in the open, they would have us at a great disadvantage."

Toward evening the Indians did what Joe had expected. They brought in their horses and made ready to start.

"By the great horn spoon!" muttered Pete. "They are coming this way. They will run right into us!"

A minute later the Indians stopped, as one of them pointed to the horses stretched out under the trees.

"Come on, Pete," whispered Joe, "we have to talk to them. You boys stay under cover."

"Hang it, Joe," replied Pete, "shooting would do more with them than talking."

But when Joe stepped out in the open, Pete did the same.

When the Indians saw the two armed men suddenly stand up within pistol shot they quickly galloped to a safe distance before they took time for another look at their unexpected camp neighbors.

Joe made signs of peace to them, but also signalled them not to approach, but to leave.

Joe and Pete knew at once that the Indians were Sioux. "They are holding a council," said Pete. "If they felt sure that there were only two of us, they would soon make up their minds what to do."

"We want to talk," one of the Indians signalled.

"No talk," Joe told them in sign. "Leave." And he and Pete pointed their rifles at the Indians.

At that the Indians yelled and scattered. They did not leave, however, but began to ride around the camp, trying to discover how many men it contained.

"I told you," said Pete, keeping his eyes on them, "that shooting would do more with them than talking. They won't leave till we do some shooting. Gun talk is the only talk these Sioux will listen to."

"We'll fight," replied Joe, "but we'll not murder men from ambush."

The Sioux were getting bolder now.

They came closer and closer to the grove, and shouted and signalled defiance at the four whites.

"White squaws!" they shouted. "Cowards! Come out and fight! You are no men!"

Very soon they began the tactics employed by the Plains Indians in those days. They raced around the camp hanging to the farther side of their ponies; and, protected that way, they fired wildly into the camp.

"They are in range!" called Joe. "Take careful aim and blaze away!"

Three ponies fell at the first fire. One Indian was dead, one badly wounded, and a third one ran hurriedly out of range. Those still on horseback had also, for the present, had enough of fighting and quickly withdrew to a safe distance.

But before it grew dark they came back for another attack. All except one, however, seemed to be afraid to come within range.

"Get that fellow on the calico pony,"

Pete called. "He is getting pretty fresh. Maybe he does not believe we are armed with breech-loaders. All together now!"

The pony fell dead, but the rider crawled away behind some bushes, and it was impossible to tell whether he was hit or not.

The remaining Sioux had no further desire to fight and disappeared into a piece of woods half a mile away.

Joe and Pete released the horses, and the poor creatures appeared very happy to be on their feet again, and at once began to appease their hunger on the grass and brush within reach.

The two men also were ready for a hearty cold supper, but the boys were too excited to eat much.

"Will they come back after dark, when we can't see them?" asked Don.

"You need not worry about that, son," said Pete, trying to dispel the lad's apprehension. "These Indians will crawl up during the night and carry away their dead and wounded, but they are not likely to molest us, unless they think they could steal our

horses. All tribes will steal horses after dark, but they will not fight, unless cornered."

There was, of course, no sleep and no cheerful fire. The horses were tied in the middle of the grove, and the four campers quietly moved from place to place, peering into the night and listening for sounds of their crafty enemies.

About midnight Joe and Pete thought it was time to move.

"Listen! Do you hear a song off east?" asked Pete. "I can just hear it. It is the death-song in the Sioux camp. They have brought in their dead, and now is the time for us to be off."

"Yes, it is time," Joe agreed. "Everything we do not absolutely need we leave here.

"We must make a dash for the Crow country west of the mouth of the Big Horn. God knows what we may run into, but it can't be much worse than what we have gone through."

CHAPTER XXXII

CAUGHT IN THE OPEN

As silently as possible, the four white travellers abandoned their camp and started southwest along the route Pete had picked out.

It seemed to the boys that, in spite of all precaution, they made enough noise to be heard a mile off. Now a horse stumbled over a rock, now one snorted or even started to whinny; for to keep still when he ought to is one of the things a horse cannot learn.

It was a rough country for night travel, and all were glad when day dawned so they could see where they were going.

At a small stream running toward the Musselshell, they made a brief halt to water the horses, let them pick a little food, and have a bite to eat for themselves. Then they pushed on as fast as possible, without straining and overheating the horses.

At noon they stopped for about an hour, and again they travelled at a steady speed, making good use of their spare horses.

When they made camp shortly before dark, both men and horses were tired and hungry. The horses were quickly staked out, the men ate a piece of dried venison, took a drink at a spring and were asleep in their blankets before the stars came out; all except Pete, who had volunteered to stand guard till midnight, when Joe would relieve him.

Early in the morning they started at a more leisurely gait, because they reasoned that they now had so long a start of the Indians that they could not be overtaken.

It was Joe's opinion that their recent enemies would first look for them in the abandoned camp, before they took up the trail, and they might not pursue a party that had inflicted such heavy loss on them.

"I should like to know," said Pete, as they wound leisurely from coulée to coulée, "where these Sioux came from, and where they are going."

Joe thought that they most likely came either from the Fort Peck country or from Manitoba. "And I think," he continued, " they are going to join the hostiles south of the Yellowstone. We do not know what is going on there, but I suspect that all these straggling Indians know where the big Sioux camps are and where Custer and Terry and Gibbon are with the soldiers.

" I have been thinking a great deal of this Indian war ever since we met the two soldiers.

" The Sioux warriors can travel faster than the soldiers. If Terry and Custer catch them at all, they are likely to catch them in one big camp, and the Indians will put up a desperate fight."

" That they will," Pete assented. " Custer will not be able to rout the Sioux the way he routed the camps on the Washita. The Sioux will fight. They have able leaders, are well armed, and are veteran fighters."

"A strange people the Indians are," mused Joe, when the company halted for a few hours' rest at noon. " I once heard a

lecturer at Boston say they were men of the Stone Age, who were still leading the life our ancestors led perhaps ten thousand years ago, and that the Stone Age men disappeared from Asia and Europe long before there was any written history.

"But the days of the wild Indians are numbered. The buffaloes are going, and when they are gone the Indians must travel the 'white man's road.' This will be the last big Indian war, but I feel that there will be some terrible fighting before it is all over."

In the afternoon the four men discovered to their horror that they were being followed.

A party of six or seven Indians had approached them within half a mile by travelling in a deep coulée. They were coming on fresh horses and were not the party from the Musselshell.

"It's a run for life!" ordered Joe. "We can't take a chance here in the open. Don't spare your horses, boys!"

It was soon apparent that the Indians were gaining.

"They are trying to cut us off from reach-

ing the Yellowstone valley," Pete called to Joe. "Look after the boys, Joe. I'm an old man. It doesn't matter about me." And the soldier turned his horse and faced the yelling savages.

The Indians at once swerved to right and left. But the fighting blood was up in the veteran of many battles. Undisturbed by the yelling and wild shooting of the Sioux, he took deliberate aim, and brought down the two nearest Indians.

But now his own pony fell, and Pete lay down flat behind his fallen horse.

When Joe and the boys heard the shots and saw their old friend unhorsed, they were at his side as quickly as the horses could carry them.

At the same moment Pete sprang to his feet, waved his arms and shouted:

"Come on, ye howling divils!"

But the Sioux had lost all desire to come on. They scattered to the northward and whipped up their horses to get out of range as fast as possible.

Pete mounted one of the extra horses, and

THEY WERE AT HIS SIDE AS QUICKLY AS THE HORSES COULD CARRY THEM.—*Page 352.*

the four men once more turned their faces toward the Yellowstone, whose valley was now in plain sight.

For several miles three of the Indians watched them, but were very careful not to come within range of Pete's rifle.

Just before dusk the four whites rode slowly into a small grove of cottonwoods half a mile from the river.

"This is a good place for a camp and for a fight," said Pete. "If any more Sioux want to try us, we can take care of a score of them here!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

TO THE LITTLE BIG HORN

If the Sioux had located the white man's camp they did consider it too risky to molest this kind of white men any more.

Although Joe and Pete omitted no precaution, they saw no sign of hostile Sioux either during the night or in the morning. The day being Sunday they intended to remain in camp.

In the afternoon, while they were discussing what to do next, the boys discovered a lone Indian riding up the Yellowstone.

Joe brought his glass to bear on him and, from the way he wore his hair in a scalp lock, at once pronounced him a Crow, or Absaroka.

"Let me see if I cannot bring him into camp," volunteered Pete. "He can tell us just where we are and where Custer and the soldiers have gone."

So Joe mounted the fastest pony and started for the river. "I may have to run him down," he remarked as he left the camp.

When the Crow saw Joe waving his hat, he was satisfied that the approaching rider was really a white man and made no attempt to escape.

Pete hoped that the old Indian had picked up a few words of English from the traders and soldiers, and asked him: "Where are we?"

"Yellowstone," replied the Crow, pointing toward the river.

"Where is the Big Horn?" inquired Pete.

"Little way," replied the Crow, pointing east. "There, near big trees."

And Pete learned with joy that they had made camp only five miles above the mouth of the Big Horn, which enters the Yellowstone from the south in the present State of Montana.

"Come to camp," Pete invited his informant. "Eat good chuck."

The Indian was quite willing to do so, for

the Crows had never been at war with the whites.

"Joe," said Pete, when he arrived with his new friend, "set out all the white man's chuck we have left. My friend here is just the man we need."

When the Crow had done full justice to Joe's sweet coffee, the last bacon and a big kettleful of corn mush, Joe had the Indian fill his pipe with real tobacco, and then Pete was ready for more talk.

"Where is Custer, Chief Long-Yellow-Hair?" asked Pete.

"March from Rosebud to Little Big Horn maybe. Gone three sleeps. Maybe, have big fight. Big Sioux camp."

"That means Custer left the Rosebud on Thursday, probably for the Little Big Horn," explained Pete. "This is Sunday, the twenty-fifth of June.

"Where is Terry and all the other soldiers?"

"March up Big Horn."

"Where is the fire-boat?"

"Go up Big Horn."

"The large fire-boat went up the Big Horn?" repeated Pete, for no steamer had ever been known to ascend the swift current of the Big Horn.

"Yes, big fire-boat go up Big Horn, when sun was high. Some soldiers on it."

When Pete became convinced that a steamer had actually gone up the Big Horn, he was strongly tempted to follow the boat.

"Joe," he asked, "dare we risk it with the lads? Some of our friends may need us, and I would sure like to be there."

Joe thought they were not likely to meet worse dangers than those they had already faced, and the boys begged to go, so they could all learn the outcome of Custer's big fight with the Sioux.

"Can we cross the Yellowstone?" he asked the Indian.

"Maybe in bull-boat. I hide bull-boat in bushes."

After a good deal of argument, and the promise of some tobacco, a hunting-knife, and a red blanket, the old man consented to guide the party of whites up the Big Horn

during the night; but he insisted that he would return when the sun came up next morning.

"Sioux," he said. "Sioux everywhere. Big camp on Little Big Horn, maybe."

He was too old, he explained, to fight the Sioux any more, but when he was a young man he had brought many Sioux scalps to his lodge.

"Joe, couldn't this Indian betray us to the Sioux?" asked Don, as the company of five was winding in silence through very rough and broken country.

"A Crow would never betray a white man to the Sioux. That would be contrary to Indian nature."

"But aren't some Indians treacherous?"

"Yes, they are. You have to know when to trust them and whom to trust."

"Does Pete know our guide?"

"No, he has never seen him before."

"Then I would be afraid to trust him. Before we left home, Uncle Reuben told us not to trust strangers at the railway stations and on trains. He said any fellow we met

who offered to show us the town was a crook. How do you know that this Indian is not a crook?"

"I am not sure that I can prove it to you before morning, but Pete and I know that we can trust this old man as safely as if we had known him all our lives.

"You see, he will not receive his two pounds of tobacco and the red blanket and the hunting-knife before he leads us to the bank of the Big Horn after daylight. This pay means as much to him as a hundred dollars to a white man. And he gets no pay till he shows us a good camp on the river bank."

"Won't he get ugly if we don't like the first camp he picks?"

"Don, how long would he stay ugly with four of us armed like highway robbers?"

"Highway robbers?" Don laughed. "Is that what we look like?"

"The police on Boston Commons would surely think so."

At this point Hank, who had waited for Don and Joe, brought word from the guide

that the man and the boy made too much talk.

It was some time after daylight when the guide pointed to a river running swiftly at the base of rocky cliffs, and said, "Big Horn." It was almost the only thing he had spoken all night, except in answer to questions.

When Pete went to a higher point to take a look up the river the boys followed him as if they had some important thing on their minds.

"Pete," asked Don, "what is our guide's name? Hank and I want to ask him something."

"I don't know," said Pete. "Don't you remember that it is bad manners among Indians to ask a man for his name? Just go and ask him what you wish to know."

The boys were anxious to know where the fire-boat was.

"We go and see," said the Crow. "Maybe I tell you."

He and the boys had no sooner arrived at the river bank, when he pointed south and

said: "Fire-boat go up that way. Make big wave here."

When they had ascended the high bank again, Pete had coffee and breakfast ready and the Indian enjoyed another good meal of white man's food, but he could not be persuaded to go up the river with them. So Joe paid him for his services and very soon he departed the way they had come.

The object of the two men and their boys was now to overtake the steamer *Far West* that had gone up the Big Horn.

They travelled with great caution, for they were aware that they were still in a dangerous country, although they did not meet with recent Indian signs. Toward the southwest, however, they saw smoke as of a big Indian camp.

During the greater part of the day they lay in concealment in a ravine near the river and early next morning they reached the steamer tied up to an island, where the Little Big Horn from the east enters the Big Horn.

To the questions of the whereabouts of

Terry and Custer, the men on the steamer could give but little more information than the old Crow guide had given to Joe and Pete.

Custer with the Seventh Cavalry had marched south from the mouth of the Rosebud on Thursday. Terry and Gibbon had gone south up the Big Horn, about thirty miles west of the Rosebud.

Captain Marsh had orders to wait with the boat at the mouth of the Little Big Horn and he was now at that place. Heavy smoke had been seen to the south on Sunday and Monday.

It was now Tuesday morning, the 27th of June. The smoke had disappeared. The general opinion was that Custer and Terry had caught the Indians in camp and had defeated them; but no messenger had arrived at the boat.

It was a beautiful summer day, and the men and soldiers off duty had begun fishing from the island.

While Captain Marsh and some officers were discussing how easy it would be for In-

dians to fire, from thickets on the banks, at fishermen and steamer, a big Indian, almost naked, holding his gun over his head as a sign of peace, suddenly rode out of the willow thicket on the river bank.

Captain Marsh and the officers at once recognized him as Curley, a Crow Scout, who had gone with Custer.

Curley showed the greatest excitement, but unfortunately he could not speak a word of English and nobody on board understood Crow, but everybody saw that he had important news.

One of the officers gave him a pencil and a piece of paper.

Curley lay down flat on the deck, drew a circle and filled it with dots.

Then he drew a larger circle around the first one and after he had made many dots in the space between the two circles, he pointed to the inner circle, and exclaimed wildly: "Absaroka! Absaroka! Absaroka!" Then he pointed to the outer circle and said: "Sioux, Sioux, Sioux!"

Then, springing to his feet, he called out:

" Poof, poof, poof. Absaroka!" made signs of shooting while he pointed at his breast, and then at his scalp lock, and made the gestures of scalping and of a Sioux scalp dance.

"Absaroka!" exclaimed Captain Marsh. " I know what that means! It is the Crow word for both their own people and for soldiers."

It was clear now to everybody that there had been a great battle, in which many soldiers had been killed.

When Curley grew a little more calm, he tried to tell by signs the story of the great battle.

There had been a big fight, in which thousands of Sioux surrounded Custer and his men.

Curley had been in the thick of it, and when he saw that all was lost, he took two blankets and tried to persuade Custer to come away. Custer refused to leave his men, but asked Curley to escape, if he could.

Curley then pulled a blanket over his head, so as to hide his Crow scalp lock, and

in this disguise he mixed in with the Sioux. There was so much noise and excitement that the Sioux failed to recognize him. Gradually he worked to the outer edge of the madly excited Sioux hordes and escaped into the sheltered valley of the Little Big Horn.

Here he had concealed himself during the hours of daylight, and by travelling down river with the greatest caution he had reached the boat.

The distance from the battlefield, it was found later, was only eleven miles, and Curley had been forty-four hours in reaching the steamer.

As far as could be made out, Curley reported that Custer and his whole regiment were killed.

Captain Baker, in command of the soldiers on the boat, could not believe the awful story, and tried to send Curley back with a message to Custer; but Curley refused to leave the steamer.

The Crow was known as a brave and reliable scout, and there was no longer any

doubt that a great calamity had befallen the soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry.

Curley refused to take food, but squatted in a corner of the deck and began to sing the death-song of his people.

The next morning, on Wednesday, a white scout of Gibbon's command, known as Muggins Taylor, stumbled on the boat, while he was being hotly pursued by Indians. From him the men on the steamer soon learned the awful story of Custer's last fight.

Custer had struck a big Sioux camp on the Little Big Horn on Sunday afternoon, the 25th of June, and had at once prepared to attack, the only thing he could do.

He divided his regiment, as he had done on the Washita, into three battalions, one under Benteen, one under Reno, and one of about 200 men he led in person.

Reno was attacked by so strong a force of Sioux that he failed to push the attack and retreated to a strong position, while all his Ree scouts fled.

The Sioux now left Reno, and all their warriors attacked Custer. They very soon

completely surrounded his battalion, and every man was killed, including Custer himself, and his young brother, Boston Custer.

Shortly after midnight on Thursday morning some fifty wounded soldiers were brought to the steamer and all hands, including Joe and Pete and their boys, made the wounded men as comfortable as possible, while Surgeons Williams and Porter examined and dressed their wounds.

The wounded men belonged to the commands of Reno and Benteen.

From Custer's own command no white man escaped alive, but a badly wounded horse, Comanche, was brought to the boat and recovered.

How Comanche escaped being killed or captured has remained a mystery. He was kept and cared for by the Seventh Cavalry as long as he lived, but no man ever rode him again after the battle on the Little Big Horn.

The steamer *Far West* took the wounded men to Fort Lincoln.

The boat reached Bismarck on the fifth

of July and from there the story of Custer's last fight with the Sioux was telegraphed to St. Paul and New York.

Joe and Pete with their boys returned to the Yellowstone in company of some soldiers and arrived at Bozeman about a week later.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Pete, as they entered the store of Thomas Stamford. "Thank God, we came through it all! It was the most dangerous journey in all my life."

"And I pray," added Joe, "that the greatest of all Indian wars may soon be over! The Sioux, although they are savages, are a brave people, who deserve to own in our great country a home, where they may live in peace and learn to travel the white man's road."

Much has been written of Custer's Last Fight. The story of Curley has been doubted, but it is most likely that this only surviving eye-witness of the battle on Custer's side told a true story.

It has been claimed that Custer brought disaster to his troop by disobeying the orders

of General Terry. This is not the place to judge a man who, both in the Civil War and in years of fighting savage Indians, risked his life many times, and finally laid it down at the call of duty on the Little Big Horn.

The battle has often been called a massacre. It was not a massacre. It was a fair fight between the soldiers who attacked and the Sioux, who defended their village, and, as they believed, their country reserved to them by a solemn treaty. It may be that the treaty of 1868 should not have been made, but it was made.

The Sioux of the present day have begun to travel the "white man's road." It has been a hard road and a hard school for them. Like most North American Indians, they have been compelled to emerge from the Stone Age into the Age of Steel and Steam within a few centuries or even decades.

It has taken the white race several thousand years to pass over the same road and through the same school.

In the clash of races, the Indian has earned our admiration. There is now no Sioux

camp where a white man's life is not as safe as in his own town. In the great World War the young men of the Sioux nation fought in the same trenches with the grandsons of the Seventh Cavalry. In all, about 10,000 Indians enlisted in the World War and proved their valor.

There will be no more wars between white men and red men.

On the battle-ground on the Little Big Horn a monument has been erected to Custer and the men of his battalion. The monument will become a shrine and the battle-ground a place of pilgrimage to those who would do honor to the men whom duty called to do battle against the most formidable hosts of the Sioux.

THE END

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